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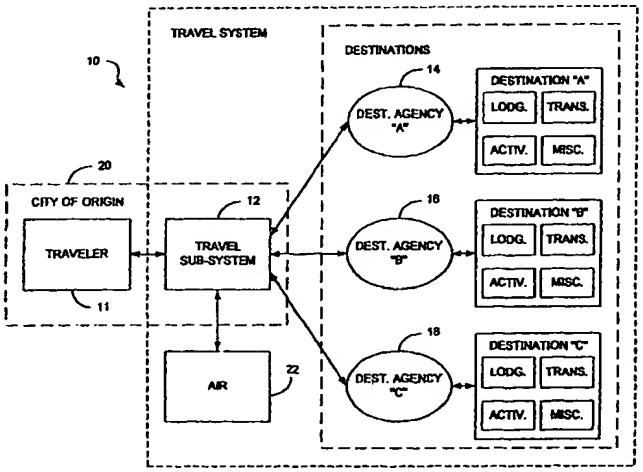

(57) Abstract

A preferred embodiment of the travel system (10) includes a plurality of destination–based travel agencies (14, 16, 18), with each of the destination–based travel agencies corresponding to a travel destination. A travel sub–system (12) also is provided which is configured to enable intercommunication between the traveler (11) and the destination–based travel agencies (14, 16, 18) so that the traveler (11) and a specific one of the destination–based travel agencies (14, 16, 18) corresponding to an intended travel destination of the traveler may intercommunicate. Preferably, the travel sub–system (12) is configured to each of the destination–based travel agencies (14, 16, 18) as well as travel information regarding the traveler (11). So configured, the travel sub–system (12) may correlate the destination information with the travel information to form a proposed itinerary of travel reservations for the traveler.

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MAKING A RESERVATION OVER THE INTERNET WHERE THE USER IS CONNECTED TO A DESTINATION BASED TRAVEL AGENT

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is based on and claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial Number 60/102,377, filed on September 29, 1998 and U.S. Utility Application Serial Number unassigned, filed on September 28, 1999.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to systems and methods for providing travel reservation services and, in particular, to systems and methods which preferably incorporate the use of destination-based travel agents for providing destination-specific travel information to travelers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

The travel industry generally includes suppliers and distributors of elementary travel services. These travel services typically include transportation services, lodging accommodations, and activities coordination, such as for tours and sporting events, for instance. Historically, travel industry suppliers, such as airlines, hotels, rental car agencies, and cruise lines, among others, typically have relied on internal sales departments and travel agencies as distributors for their services. Heretofore, however, travel agencies typically have been unable to provide a uniform distribution channel for the promotion and sale of travel services because such agencies are highly fragmented, including thousands of "brick and mortar" offices which are, oftentimes, independently operated. This fragmentation is accentuated by the fact that there are relatively few internationally, or even nationally, recognized entities which distribute travel services.

Typically, a traditional travel agency operates as a locally-based agency whereby a traveler located in the vicinity of that travel agency would contact the agency for making various travel reservations at an intended destination site. The locally-based agency then may provide recommendations, such as for activities

occurring at the destination during the traveler's stay. However, from the perspective of the traveler, these recommendations may not be as comprehensive as desired. For example, the locally-based agency may not be aware of events occurring at the destination site that may have an impact upon the traveler's plans, and thus, the recommendations could detrimentally affect the traveler. For instance, extensive road construction taking place between the lodging site, which was recommended to the traveler by the locally-based agency, and a business meeting location could detrimentally affect the traveler's schedule.

Additionally, a locally-based agency typically is able to coordinate the reservation of air transportation for a traveler. Such reservations oftentimes are made through an electronic global distribution service (GDS) which provides real-time access to voluminous data on air fares, availability and other transportation information. Since the GDS data typically is constantly changing, with as many as one million airfare changes being made daily, for instance, a traveler traditionally has relied on travel agents at the locally-based agency to access and interpret such data. As a result, the ability of travelers to obtain the most favorable air transportation schedules and fares has been subject to the skill and experience of the travel agents of the locally-based travel agency.

In contrast to the locally-based travel agencies, online agencies, i.e., agencies which are accessible through the use of the Internet, have recently begun to conduct nearly wholly-automated transactions between a traveler and a remote agency. Thus far, however, such online agencies typically have tended to avoid live human assistance at their Internet sites so as to be as nearly wholly-automated as possible. Without the advent of the availability of human assistance, however, many of these online agencies are discovering that travelers tend to utilize the searching services offered by their web sites, while choosing to interact with a human operator at a different agency for actually booking their reservations. This reluctance to book reservations with an online agency can be attributed to numerous factors, including customer reluctance to disclose credit card information directly over a computer, customer concern as to whether they are getting the best available price for a particular reservation, and

customer reluctance in trusting a computer-generated reservation confirmation, among others.

Therefore, there is a need in the art for improved systems and methods which address these and other shortcomings of the prior art.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Briefly stated, the present invention is directed to travel systems and methods for use by a traveler in making travel reservations. In a preferred embodiment, the travel system includes a plurality of destination-based travel agencies, with each of the destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a travel destination. A travel sub-system also is provided which is configured to enable intercommunication between the traveler and the destination-based travel agencies so that the traveler and a specific one of the destination-based travel agencies corresponding to an intended travel destination of the traveler may intercommunicate. Preferably, the travel sub-system is configured to compile destination information regarding the travel destination corresponding to each of the destination-based travel agencies as well as travel information regarding the traveler. So configured, the travel sub-system may correlate the destination information with the travel information to form a proposed itinerary of travel reservations for the traveler.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a preferred method includes: (1) providing a plurality of destination-based travel agencies interconnected via a communications network, with each of the destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a travel destination; (2) providing a traveler with a plurality of travel reservation selections via the communications network, with each of the travel reservation selections corresponding to one of the destination-based travel agencies, and; (3) enabling the traveler to communicate via the communications network with the one of the destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a specific one of the travel reservation selections selected by the traveler. Preferably, the method includes compiling information regarding each of the travel reservation selections from the destination-based travel agencies corresponding to the travel reservation selections.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a preferred embodiment of the travel system includes a computer readable medium incorporating a first code segment which provides a traveler with a plurality of travel reservation selections, with each of the travel reservation selections corresponding to a destination-based travel agency. Preferably, a second code segment is provided which enables the traveler to communicate with the one of the destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a specific one of the travel reservation selections selected by the traveler.

Other features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to one of reasonable skill in the art upon examination of the following drawings and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional objects, features, and advantages be included herein within the scope of the present invention, as defined by the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be more fully understood from the accompanying drawings of various embodiments of the invention which, however, should not be taken to limit the invention to the specific embodiments enumerated, but are for explanation and for better understanding only. Furthermore, the drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon clearly illustrating the principles of the invention. In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a high level schematic diagram of a prior art travel reservation methodology.

FIG. 2 is a high level schematic diagram representing a travel reservation methodology embodied in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a high level schematic diagram of a prior art travel reservation system depicting interaction of a representative traveler with a representative locally-based travel agency.

FIG. 4 is a high level schematic diagram depicting a preferred embodiment of the travel system of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a high level schematic diagram of a preferred embodiment of the travel system of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of the travel system server of the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a screen print of a representative web site home page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 10 is a screen print of a representative destinations page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 11 is a screen print of a representative destination information page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 12 is a screen print of a representative activities page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 13 is a screen print of a representative basic travel information page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 14 is a block diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of the travel sub-system of the present invention.

FIG. 15 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 16 is a screen print of a representative profile page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 17 is a screen print of a representative profile (billing information) page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 18 is a screen print of a representative profile (personal interest) page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 19 is a screen print of a representative profile (airline preference) page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 20 is a screen print of a representative profile (accommodations information) page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 21 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 22 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 23 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 24 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 25 is a screen print of a representative flight page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 26 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 27 is a screen print depicting a representative list of proposed flight information utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 28 is a screen print of a representative reservation confirmation page utilized in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 29 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 30 is a flow diagram functionally demonstrating the steps performed by a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Reference will now be made in detail to the drawings wherein like reference numerals indicate like parts throughout the several views. As shown in FIG. 1, a typical prior art methodology 600 for providing travel reservation services includes the use of a locally-based travel agency 610. The locally-based agency typically caters to a local market 620 which interacts with the locally-based agency. Typically, a traveler from the local market conducts either a face-to-face or telephonic interview with an agent of the locally-based agency, with the local agent providing information on a variety of

travel services. These travel services typically are not limited to services provided in the geographic area surrounding the locally-based agency and, in fact, oftentimes are of a global nature. Thus, a typical traveler is able to make travel reservations at virtually any location, and is thereby provided with a global travel reservation product 630. However, such global products typically are offered to the traveler without specialized knowledge, such as time-sensitive knowledge, of the products because the agent of the locally-based agency does not interact with the traveler's destination on a frequent basis.

As shown in FIG. 2, however, a methodology 500 preferably utilized by the present invention is adapted to cater to travelers from a global market 510. Preferably, the travelers are able to interact with travel agents located at the traveler's destination, such as at a destination-based agency 520, thereby allowing the traveler to receive specialized knowledge of the travel services being offered at the destination site because the destination-based travel agent interacts with the traveler's destination on a frequent basis. Thus, the traveler receives a local or destination-based travel service product 530.

As shown in greater detail in FIG. 3, a prior art travel system 640 employing the prior art methodology 600 (FIG. 1) typically provides for interaction of a traveler 11 with a locally-based agency 610. This interaction typically occurs at a city of origin 650 of the traveler. Inquiries made by the traveler to the locally-based agency are then answered based on information made available to the locally-based agency, with such information typically being made available through sources which offer time-late and oftentimes inadequate information, if such information is available at all. In response to the various inquiries of the traveler, the locally-based agency may then be able to make travel reservations for the traveler at various destinations 660, such as destinations A, B, and C (665, 670 and 675, respectively). Such travel reservations may include the reservation of lodging accommodations, transportation, and activities, among others. Thus, the locally-based agency may be responsible for arranging numerous travel services for the traveler while it possesses little or no specialized knowledge of the various services reserved. Additionally, the locally-based agency

typically may be consulted by the traveler for arranging air transportation 680 between the city of origin and the various destinations, such as through the use of a GDS.

As shown in FIG. 4, a preferred embodiment of the travel system 10 of the present invention avoids many of the potential inadequacies inherent in the prior art locally-based travel agency reservation system by providing a network of destination-based travel agencies for interacting with a traveler 11. The travel system 10 preferably incorporates a travel sub-system 12 which provides a communications interface between the traveler and one or more destination-based travel agencies, such as destination agencies 14, 16, and 18. So provided, a traveler utilizing the travel system 10 may be provided with specialized information via the destination-based agencies so that the traveler's reservation preferences and needs may be more accurately fulfilled.

Preferably, traveler 11 is able to interact with the travel system 10 from numerous locations, such as the traveler's city of origin 20, among others. So provided, the traveler may be able to make various travel service reservations corresponding to various destination sites, regardless of the traveler's physical location. Additionally, the travel sub-system 12 preferably communicates with one or more air travel reservation services 22, such as a GDS, for providing the traveler with updated information on air transportation options.

As shown in FIG. 5, traveler 11 preferably interacts with the travel system 10 by communicating with a travel system server 24 via a network 26, such as an Internet, PSTN, Intranet or other suitable communications network. The network 26 preferably provides intercommunication of the travel system server 24 with one or more destination-based agencies, such as destination-based agency 14. Preferably, intercommunication of the travel system server 24 and the agency 14 is facilitated by the travel sub-system 12 which is located on the server. In the embodiment depicted in FIG. 5, the travel system server also directly communicates with an air reservation system 22, such as a GDS; however, it is anticipated that communication between the server and the air reservation system 22 may take place by interconnection of the server and the air reservation system via the network 26.

The travel sub-system 12 of the present invention can be implemented in hardware, software, firmware, or a combination thereof. In a preferred embodiment, however, the travel sub-system is implemented as a software package, which can be adaptable to run on different platforms and operating systems as shall be described further herein.

A preferred embodiment of the travel sub-system 12, which comprises an ordered listing of executable instructions for implementing logical functions, can be embodied in any computer-readable medium for use by or in connection with an instruction execution system, apparatus, or device, such as a computer-based system, processor-containing system, or other system that can fetch the instructions from the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device, and execute the instructions. In the context of this document, a "computer-readable medium" can be any means that can contain, store, communicate, propagate or transport the program for use by or in connection with the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device. The computer readable medium can be, for example, but not limited to, an electronic, magnetic, optical, electro-magnetic, infrared, or semi-conductor system, apparatus, device, or propagation medium. More specific examples (a nonexhaustive list) of the computer-readable medium would include the following: an electrical connection (electronic) having one or more wires, a portable computer diskette (magnetic), a random access memory (RAM) (magnetic), a read-only memory (ROM) (magnetic), an erasable, programmable, read-only memory (EPROM or Flash memory) (magnetic), an optical fiber (optical), and a portable compact disk read-only memory (CDROM) (optical). Note that the computer-readable medium could even be paper or another suitable medium upon which the program is printed, as the program can be electronically captured, via for instance, optical scanning of the paper or other medium, then compiled, interpreted, or otherwise processed in a suitable manner, if necessary, and then stored in a computer memory.

FIG. 6 illustrates a typical computer or processor-based system 400 which may be utilized by the travel system 10 and which, in turn, may utilize the travel sub-system 12. As shown in FIG. 6, a computer system 501 generally comprises a processor 502 and a memory 503 with an operating system 504. Herein, the memory 503 may be

any combination of volatile and nonvolatile memory elements, such as random access memory, read only memory, or the like. The processor 502 accepts instructions and data from memory 503 over a local interface, such as a bus(es) 308. The system also includes an input device(s) 506 and an output device(s) 507. Examples of input devices may include, but are not limited to a serial port, a scanner, or a local access network connection. Examples of output devices may include, but are not limited to, a video display, a Universal Serial Bus, or a printer port. Generally, the travel sub-system may run any of a number of different platforms and operating systems, including, but not limited to, Windows NT™, Unix™, or Sun Solaris™ operating systems. The travel sub-system 12, the functions of which shall be described hereinafter, resides in memory 503 and is executed by the processor 502.

The flow chart of FIG. 7 shows the architecture, functionality, and operation of a preferred implementation of the travel sub-system 12. In this regard, each block of the flow chart represents a module segment or portion of code which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified logical function or functions. It should also be noted that in some alternative implementations, the functions noted in the various blocks may occur out of the order depicted in FIG. 7. For example, two blocks shown in succession in FIG. 7 may in fact be executed substantially concurrently, or the blocks may sometimes be executed in the reverse order depending upon the functionality involved.

In the embodiment depicted in FIG. 7, a traveler is provided with access to the travel system as depicted in block 30, such as by accessing an Internet web site hosted by the travel system server 24. Typically, such a web site may be accessed by travelers through the use of an Internet connection and a browser program which typically resides in the traveler's computer system. Browser programs, also called "web browsers," are client applications that enable a user to navigate the Internet and view web sites on the display screen of the traveler's computer. A representative home page that may be displayed to the traveler once the web site of the travel system has been accessed is depicted in FIG. 8.

The representative home page depicted in FIG. 8 provides the traveler with access to various information which may be displayed on various pages of the web site,

for instance. Access to these other pages may be provided in a conventional manner, such as through the use of icons, i.e. tabs 32-52, which when actuated, such as by "double-clicking," advance the traveler through the web site to the page or pages corresponding to the actuated tab. Imbedded textual links, such as text links 54 and 56, also may be utilized to provide access to other pages of the web site. Additionally, the web site may provide a communications link between the traveler and an agent of the travel system and/or of a destination-based travel agency. Such a communications link preferably is provided through the use of a text-based dialog box 58 and/or an audio link 60, described in detail hereinafter.

Through use of the web site, the traveler may choose to research various travel service options, including destination and activity information relating to a potential trip, among others, such as depicted in the flow chart of FIG. 9. For example, if the traveler desires information pertaining to a particular destination, the traveler may double-click on tab 42 (FIGs. 8 and 9), after which, the traveler may be advanced to a destination list screen. At the destination screen, such as destination page 62 depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 10, the traveler may be presented with a list of destinations, such as list 64. The traveler may then select a destination as depicted in block 66 (FIG. 9).

Upon making a destination selection, such as by highlighting destination 68, e.g., "Albuquerque, NM," and then actuating icon 70, e.g., the "Go to the selected city" icon, the traveler preferably is presented with destination-specific information regarding the selected destination, such as through the use of a specific destination page 72 depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 11. Additionally, links to other information and travel system services may be provided through the use of icons, such as icons 74-86, for instance.

Through the web site, the traveler also may choose to research particular activities of interest. Access to such information preferably is provided by the traveler actuating tab 44 (FIGs. 8 and 9), for instance, after which, the traveler may be advanced to an activity list screen 88, such as depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 12. At screen 88, the traveler may be presented with a list of activities, such as list 90. The traveler may then select an activity (block 92 of FIG. 9), such as

by highlighting activity 94 (FIG. 12), e.g., "(Anything)." The system may then query as to whether there are any destinations which offer the selected activity, as depicted in block 96 (FIG. 9). If no such destinations exist in the system database, a message 98, such as a "No destination with the activity" message may be displayed to the traveler. If, however, at least one destination with the selected activity exists, the system may proceed to block 100 where a list, such as list 64, of destinations which offer the selected activity may be provided. The traveler may then select a destination (block 102), such as by actuating icon 70 (FIG. 12), e.g., the "Go to the selected city" icon, after which, the traveler is presented with information, such as information regarding activities at the selected destination as depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 11, described hereinbefore.

Referring back to FIG. 7, after the traveler has accessed the travel system and has utilized the system to conduct travel research, for instance, the system may proceed to block 110 where the system may prompt the traveler to provide basic travel information, such as depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 13. Such information may include information regarding departure and return dates (112 and 114, respectively), departure and destination airports (not shown), and the number of travelers (116). Additionally, the traveler may be prompted to provide a request for travel service recommendations, such as recommendations regarding flights, lodging and activities (118). The traveler's responses may be indicated by toggling a graphical switch or by actuating an icon, among others. As described in detail hereinafter, this information may be utilized by the system to compile resident profile (RP) for the traveler.

By use of the edit text box 120, the traveler may enter questions or comments regarding their trip, with the entered information being provided to an agent, such as a destination based agent, for instance. The agent may then respond with various suggestions which are specifically tailored to meet the needs of the traveler. For example, such responses may be communicated to the traveler along with a proposed itinerary, as discussed in detail hereinafter. Additionally, the traveler may be presented with an icon 122, such as an "Add Activities" icon, which, when actuated by the traveler, may present the traveler with a variety of activities which the traveler may

wish to add to their trip. Preferably, the activities presented to the traveler are selected from a database, i.e., an inventory database, for instance, which is compiled by the destination-based franchisee corresponding to the destination of the traveler. Preferably, the activities presented also must correspond to selections previously made by the traveler, such as selections relating to preferences, pricing, etc. The traveler then may add one or more of the presented activities to his trip.

After the traveler has provided the basic travel information requested, a query preferably is be made as to whether the traveler is a registered system member (block 130). If it is determined that the traveler is a system member, the process preferably proceeds to block 140, where specific "member only" features of the travel system may be enabled. As used herein, the term "system member" is utilized to denote a traveler who has previously accessed the travel system and who has previously provided the system with information; however, membership determinations may be based on numerous other criteria depending on the particular application. In some embodiments, a membership determination need not be accomplished. The system then preferably proceeds to block 150, where the traveler may be prompted to provide additional information, such as additional travel information, and/or personal or "profile" information (described in detail hereinafter), for example.

After block 150, the system preferably proceeds to block 160 where the traveler's information is evaluated. A proposed itinerary (PI) then is generated and is communicated to the traveler for review. Then, such as depicted in block 170, a query is made as to whether the traveler requires any changes to be made to the PI. If it is determined that no changes to the PI are required and, further, that the traveler accepts the PI, such as depicted in block 180, the system may proceed to finalize the transaction (block 190). If, however, the traveler requires changes to the PI, the system preferably proceeds to block 200, where intercommunication, such as by use of an online chat feature, between the destination-based agency and the traveler may be initiated.

Intercommunication between destination-based agency and the traveler may be initiated at or between virtually an step or steps of the flow chart depicted in FIG. 7, such as when the traveler accesses the travel system, when the traveler does not accept

a PI, or when the traveler chooses a destination, among others. Such intercommunication, enables the traveler to query the destination-based agency in regard to various aspects of an intended trip, while allowing the destination-based agency to query the traveler as to various aspects of the traveler's intended trip. So provided, the traveler may experience a more user-friendly environment while attempting to navigate the numerous decisions which may be involved in the making of travel reservations in an online environment, while the destination-based agency has the opportunity to recommend or "push" travel products and services to the traveler.

After the traveler has communicated with the destination-based agency, the system may proceed back to block 160 where the traveler's information is evaluated and a PI based upon this information is generated. The system may then proceed, as described hereinbefore, until a transaction is either finalized or until the traveler chooses to depart from the travel system.

As described briefly hereinbefore, the travel system of the present invention preferably utilizes traveler-specific information as well as destination-specific information in order to generate a PI for a traveler. Reference will now be made in detail to these various aspects of the present invention. As depicted in FIG. 14, a preferred embodiment of the travel sub-system 12 utilized in the travel system of the present invention incorporates a franchisee database (Fd) 210 and a resident profile database (RPd) 220. Preferably, the Fd 210 includes destination-specific information provided by destination-based travel agencies or franchisees (the term "franchisee" being utilized herein to describe a destination-based travel agency that is affiliated with the travel system). Such information may include: general information 212 concerning the franchisee and the destination area; event information 214 describing various upcoming events at or near the destination area, and an inventory record 216, which may include restaurants, museums, golf courses, shopping venues, cultural events, hotels, motels, condominiums, inns, etc., and which may designate whether the various items in the inventory are offered individually or as packaged services, among others.

Preferably, the Fd 210 is compiled by travel system by allowing a destination-based travel agency to communicate with the travel sub-system, such as through the use of an internet web site, whereby the destination-based travel agency is prompted to

enter the aforementioned information. The travel system preferably provides a secure function for granting access to those destination-based travel agencies who desire to affiliate with the travel system and who have not previously entered franchisee information for use in the franchisee database. Such a secure function may include the use of a user ID and password which may be obtained directly from agents of the travel system and which, upon issuance, may allow the destination-based travel agency to access the various portions of a web site for entering information. Upon approval by the travel system, the destination-based travel agency then may be granted franchisee status. Franchisees also may be granted access to the travel system in order to update previously entered information which has since become stale.

As described hereinbefore, a preferred embodiment of the travel system also incorporates the use of an RPd 220 (FIG. 14), which may include information regarding traveler needs 222, traveler preferences 224 and traveler traits 226, among others. RPd 220 typically is constructed by a traveler accessing the travel system web site (FIG. 8), and by actuating the create/edit profile tab 38, such as depicted in the flow chart of FIG. 15. Once the tab is actuated, the traveler preferably is advanced to a create/edit profile page 230, such as depicted in FIG. 16. In some embodiments, the travel system may then read a traveler's internet temp files (block 232), such as are typically stored in the memory of the traveler's computer, to determine if previously entered profile information exists on the traveler, or to create an initial profile for storage in the RPd.

If profile information already exists on the traveler, such as determined in block 234, the traveler's user ID may be evaluated and stored as a cookie for display (block 236), with the traveler then being prompted to key in a password (block 238), such as at item 240 (FIG. 16). The traveler then is given the option of updating the profile information stored in the RPd by scrolling through the various profile display screens 242, such as depicted in the representative screen prints of FIGs. 16-20, which prompt the user to enter profile information. Such profile information may include personal identification information (FIG. 16), billing information (FIG. 17), personal interest information (FIG. 18), travel preference information (FIG. 19), and accommodations information (FIG. 20), among others. If profile information does not exist on the

traveler, the system may proceed from block 234 to block 244 where the traveler preferably is advanced through the various profile display screens 242.

Preferred embodiments of the travel system utilize the profile information stored in the RPd to create a resident profile (RP) of the traveler. As briefly described hereinbefore in regard to FIG. 7, once the travel system determines that a traveler accessing the system is a member, certain "member only" features may be enabled. For instance, if an RP for the traveler exists, such as typically is the case when the traveler is a system member, for example, the travel system may correlate the RP data with travel service information provided by the travel system 10 and the basic travel information (i.e., FIG. 13) provided by the traveler, so that a series of recommended travel reservation selections specifically tailored to suit the traveler are generated. Such functionality is depicted in the flow chart of FIG. 21.

As shown in FIG. 21, after the traveler has entered the basic travel information (112, 114, 118 and 120, for instance), the system determines whether the traveler is logged into the system (block 250), such as described in relation to FIG. 15. The system then may proceed to block 252 where, if traveler profile information does not exist, profile information is created. The traveler then may be advanced to an activities/lodging page 254, where various selections (256, 258 and 260, among others) may be displayed to the traveler. As shown in block 262, the various selections preferably are provided by merging data from the RPd 220 with travel service information, such as information stored in the franchisee inventory database 216, with the selections being utilized to generate a vacation plan for the traveler (block 264). Thus, the travel system may provide a tailored offering of travel reservation selections while giving the traveler the option of choosing from these selections.

As shown in FIG. 22, the travel reservation selections preferably are displayed as an itinerary for review by the traveler (block 266). In block 268, the traveler then is given an opportunity to make changes to the itinerary, such as by adding or deleting events and/or making scheduling changes among the various events. The traveler's changes and/or comments, questions, etc., are then submitted back to the travel system, such as depicted in block 270, with the system then updating the traveler's vacation plan (block 272).

After the traveler's vacation plan has been updated, such as by updating information in a traveler itinerary database, a message indicating that a trip application (TA) has been received by the travel system may be sent to the destination-based franchisee corresponding with the traveler's intended destination (block 274). Preferably, the destination-based franchisee may display the traveler's TA on a display screen, for example, at the franchisee's office so that the TA may be reviewed by one of the franchisee's agents (block 276). Sending the TA to the destination-based franchisee allows the franchisee to modify the TA based upon availability of the various travel services scheduled by the traveler, such as depicted in block 278. Such display of the TA also allows the franchisee to offer itinerary suggestions and to answer questions of the traveler in an interactive forum, thus allowing the traveler to receive potentially valuable information from a travel agent who is familiar with the traveler's destination.

Once any modifications have been made to the TA by the destination-based franchisee, the information is submitted back to the travel system (block 280). Preferably, as depicted in block 282, the travel system sends the traveler a proposed itinerary (PI), such as in the form of an e-mail message, for instance, as well as updates various system databases with information contained within the PI. As depicted in the flow chart of FIG. 23, the traveler then is prompted to review the PI, such as by clicking on embedded links contained within the e-mail message transmitted to the traveler (block 284). These links may advance the traveler to various pages of the system web site, such as to a vacation plan page (block 286) or flight page (block 288), with the traveler then being given the opportunity to review the displayed PI information (blocks 290 and 292). The traveler then may either accept (blocks 294 and 296), reject (blocks 298 and 300)or make further changes to the PI (blocks 302 and 304). As depicted in the flow chart of FIG. 23, some embodiments of the present invention may provide for separate review and disposition of various aspects of the traveler's plans, although in other embodiments, these process steps may be accomplished simultaneously.

As described hereinbefore, preferred embodiments of the travel system also provide access to flight reservation services, which, in some embodiments, may be

provided in the absence of other travel reservation services. In a preferred embodiment (the functionality of which is depicted in the flow chart of FIG. 24), access is provided through links, such as by actuating tab 40 of the travel system home page (FIG. 8). Preferably, the system may initiate a traveler confirmation program 310 which utilizes information from the RPd 220 to determine whether the traveler is a system member (block 312).

If it is determined that the traveler is a member, the system may extract information from the customer itinerary database to determine whether there are any saved itineraries for the traveler on file (block 314). If so, the traveler then may be advance to a find-a-flight page 316, such as depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 25. There, the saved itineraries may be displayed to the traveler as recommended travel selections. However, if no saved itineraries are located, the travel system may generate an itinerary based on other information provided by the traveler and which is displayed to the traveler, such as on the find-a-flight page 316.

Preferably, find-a-flight page 316 prompts the traveler to select flight reservation information, such as air travel preferences 318, departure details 320, and return details 322, among others. The traveler also may view itineraries which the traveler has previously completed, such as by actuating the "saved trip plans" icon 324. Preferably, such plans are stored in the travel sub-system and are referenced by traveler identification information. Additionally, the travel sub-system may store information relating to previous searches of the air reservation system, and may provide the stored information to the traveler for review by use of the "previous searches" icon 326. Once all the traveler's information has been entered, the entered information then may be submitted to the system (block 328) by actuating the find-a-flight icon 330, for instance.

Referring now to FIG. 26, based on the information provided by the traveler and, preferably, information provided by an airline reservation system or GDS, the travel system may utilized a computer reservation system (CRS) program to interpret GDS information (block 340) and then display flight information for the traveler, such as on an available flights display (block 350). Since the GDS information typically is not presented in a user-friendly format, preferably, the CRS is able to present the GDS

information in a user-friendly format, such as depicted in the available flights display 350 of FIG. 27.

Preferably, once the information provided by the traveler and the information provided by the GDS has been received by the travel system, the traveler's preferences, *i.e.*, preferences stored in the RPd, if applicable, are merged with the aforementioned information (block 352) to develop the available flights display 350. Then, the traveler may either select one or more of the various flights, such as by clicking on a displayed flight (block 354), or the traveler may reject all of the flights, such as depicted in block 356. If a flight is accepted, the system may proceed to block 358 where the system generates a flight reservation. For instance, once the traveler selects one or more of the displayed flights, the travel system may display a list of the selected flights 360, such as depicted in the representative screen print of FIG. 28. Confirmation of the traveler's desire to purchase the selected flight reservations is then requested, with such confirmation being requested in various manners, such as by requesting the traveler to actuate an icon, i.e., the "Confirm Purchase" icon 362. Upon confirmation, billing information provided by the traveler, such as entered into credit card information box 366, or billing information stored in the RPd, is processed.

Alternatively, if the traveler rejected the flights (block 356 of FIG. 26), the system may proceed to block 364 for generation of an exception report and, preferably, the traveler is returned to the system home page. Additionally, if the traveler neither accepts nor rejects the selections, the traveler may choose to communicate with an agent of the travel system or of the destination-based franchisee (block 400) in order to gain additional information about the various flights.

As shown in greater detail in the flow chart of FIG. 29, intercommunication of a traveler and agent preferably is facilitated through use of the find-a-flight page dialog box 410 (also depicted in FIG. 25). The traveler enters questions into the dialog box (block 412) and then submits the questions to the agent (block 414). Preferably, the agent views the traveler's questions on screen (block 416) and then responds to the questions, such as depicted in block 418. This response may include gathering additional information about flights as well as other information, with the gathered

information then being displayed to the traveler (block 420), such as in the dialog box 410.

Alternatively, if a traveler is not able to find an acceptable flight and/or fare, the traveler may direct the agent to continue to search for suitable flights and fares. Specifically, the traveler may work with the agent to create a bid for purchasing a certain airline ticket during a certain time period for an amount not to exceed a specified amount. The agent can then search not only a conventional flight reservation system, such as a GDS, but also may have additional time to search supplier and distributor web sites to find an airline ticket that meets the traveler's criteria. If a matching fare is found, this bid may be construed as a firm offer by the traveler for an amount of the net discovered price, plus a commission or service fee.

For example, if a traveler were to want a round-trip ticket to a certain destination for $400, during a predetermined period of time the travel system may use that bid as an offer. If the travel system, *i.e.*, a franchisee agent, or an agent of the travel system, is able to find a ticket for $250, the traveler would be able to purchase the ticket for $250 plus a transaction fee, with the overall cost to the traveler being less than or equal to the $400 bid. If, on the other hand, the best accommodating fare were higher than the amount authorized by the traveler, then the agent could conditionally reserve the flight and then return to the traveler with a suggested offer which would be required to purchase the flight reservation. If this higher amount is then authorized and if the conditionally reserved flight is still available, then the agent would be able to consummate the sale at this higher amount.

Referring now to FIG. 30, finalizing a transaction, whether the transaction includes generation of reservations or a rejection by the traveler of the PI, typically includes updating the itinerary database and the RPd of the traveler. For instance, when a traveler has accepted a PI (block 430), the system may refer to the traveler's stored billing information, such as depicted in block 435, in order to determine whether the traveler has sufficient credit to pay for the requested travel services. If it is determined that the traveler is able to pay, the system may finalize the traveler's itinerary, send information to the traveler, such as a copy of the itinerary, billing and

reservation confirmation numbers, and send the confirmation and billing information regarding the transaction to the franchisee (block 440).

If, however, it is determined that the traveler is unable to pay for the travel reservations (block 435), the traveler may be sent a rejection message (block 445), such as an e-mail message, for instance, informing him that the transaction may not be finalized. Preferably, the travel system then may update its various databases, including the traveler itinerary and RPd, as depicted in block 450. Likewise, when a traveler rejects a PI (block 455), the travel system also may update its various databases (block 450). Additionally, the system may send a rejection notice to the franchisee (block 460) and may generate one or more other status reports, such as an exception report, for use by agents of the travel system for monitoring the operation of the system.

The foregoing description has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Obvious modifications or variations are possible in light of the above teachings. The embodiment or embodiments discussed, however, were chosen and described to provide the best illustration of the principles of the invention and its practical application to thereby enable one of ordinary skill in the art to utilize the invention in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. All such modifications and variations, are within the scope of the invention as determined by the appended claims when interpreted in accordance with the breadth to which they are fairly and legally entitled.

CLAIMS

1. A travel system for use by a traveler in making travel reservations, said travel system comprising:

a plurality of destination-based travel agencies, each of said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a travel destination; and

a travel sub-system configured to enable intercommunication between the traveler and said destination-based travel agencies such that said travel sub-system enables the traveler and a specific one of said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to an intended travel destination of the traveler to intercommunicate.

2. The travel system of claim 1, wherein said travel sub-system is configured to compile destination information regarding said travel destination corresponding to each of said destination-based travel agencies and travel information regarding the traveler, said travel sub-system further being configured to correlate said destination information with said travel information to form a proposed itinerary of travel reservations for the traveler.

3. The travel system of claim 1, wherein intercommunication of the traveler and said specific one of said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to said intended travel destination is facilitated by an Internet web site hosted by said travel sub-system such that said intercommunication occurs via an online chat sequence.

4. The travel system of claim 2, wherein said travel sub-system is configured to compile profile information regarding the traveler, said profile information comprising at least one of the group consisting of traveler preferences, traveler needs, and traveler traits, said travel sub-system further being configured to correlate said destination information, said travel information, and said profile information to form said proposed itinerary of travel reservations for the traveler.

5. The travel system of claim 2, wherein said travel sub-system hosts an Internet web site configured to display a list of each of said travel destinations corresponding to each of said destination-based travel agencies to the traveler, each of said travel destinations being selectable by the traveler such that upon selection of a

specific one of said travel destinations, said web site displays said destination information corresponding to said specific one of said travel destinations to the traveler.

6. The travel system of claim 2, wherein said proposed itinerary is communicated to the traveler via an e-mail message.

7. The travel system of claim 2, wherein said proposed itinerary is communicated to the traveler, and wherein said travel sub-system is configured to provide the traveler with options regarding said proposed itinerary, said options being selected from the group consisting of accepting, rejecting, and requesting further information regarding said proposed itinerary.

8. The travel system of claim 2, wherein said travel sub-system is configured to receive a offer of purchase for a travel reservation desired by the traveler, and in response thereto, is further configured to search for the travel reservation being offered at a price no greater than said offer for purchase, said travel sub-system being further configured to notify the traveler when the travel reservation is located.

9. The travel system of claim 5, wherein said destination information comprises information from the group consisting of events information and lodging information.

10. The travel system of claim 5, wherein, upon selection of said specific one of said travel destinations by the traveler, said travel system is configured to notify a specific one of said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to said specific one of said travel destinations such that said specific one of said destination-based travel agencies is prompted to communicate with the traveler.

11. The travel system of claim 7, wherein, upon the traveler accepting said proposed itinerary, information regarding said proposed itinerary is compiled with said profile information of the traveler.

12. A method for providing travel reservations to a traveler, said method comprising:

providing a plurality of destination-based travel agencies, each of said destination-based travel agencies interconnected via a communications network and each corresponding to a travel destination;

providing the traveler with a plurality of travel reservation selections via the communications network, each of said travel reservation selections corresponding to one of said destination-based travel agencies;

enabling the traveler to communicate via the communications network with said one of said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a specific one of said travel reservation selections selected by the traveler.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the step of providing the traveler with a plurality of travel reservation selections comprises compiling information regarding each of said travel reservation selections from said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to said travel reservation selections.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein the communications network is the Internet, and wherein the step of enabling the traveler to communicate comprises hosting a web site on the Internet, said web site being accessible by the traveler.

15. The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of correlating said information regarding each of said travel reservation selections to form a proposed itinerary of travel reservations for the traveler.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the step of enabling the traveler to communicate comprises providing an online chat feature accessible by the traveler and said one of said destination-based travel agencies.

17. A computer readable medium having a computer program for providing travel reservations to a traveler via a travel system, the travel system including a plurality of destination-based travel agencies, the computer readable medium comprising: a first code segment which provides the traveler with a plurality of travel reservation selections, each of said travel reservation selections corresponding to one of the destination-based travel agencies; a second code segment which enables the traveler to communicate with the one of said destination-based travel agencies corresponding to a specific one of the travel reservation selections selected by the traveler.

AMENDED CLAIMS

[received by the International Bureau on 16 February 2000 (16.02.00);
new claims 18-23 added; remaining claims unchanged (2 pages)]

18. A method for a travel service to provide travel reservations to a traveler via the Internet, said method comprising: providing a web site on the Internet, the web site being accessible by the traveler; receiving travel information from the traveler via the web site; automatically accessing a database of travel reservation selections based upon the travel information provided by the traveler; automatically providing the traveler with selected ones of the travel reservation selections via the web site, the selected ones of the travel reservation selections corresponding to the travel information provided by the traveler; allowing the traveler and a representative of the travel service to communicate over the Internet such that the representative may provide the traveler with additional travel information based upon a response of the traveler to the selected ones of the travel reservation selections.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the step of allowing the traveler and a representative of the travel service to communicate comprises allowing the representative to query the traveler as to a reason for rejecting the travel reservation selections when the traveler does not accept at least one of the selected ones of the travel reservation selections.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein the response of the traveler is a failure of the traveler to respond to the selected ones of the travel reservation selections within a defined period of time, and wherein the step of allowing the traveler and a representative of the travel service to communicate comprises: communicating additional travel information to the traveler after the defined period of time has elapsed such that the representative may suggest alternative travel reservation selections to the traveler.

21. The method of claim 18, wherein the step of allowing the traveler and a representative of the travel service to communicate comprises allowing the traveler and a representative of the travel service to communicate via a dialog box.

22. A method for a travel service to provide travel reservations to a traveler, said method comprising: receiving travel information from the traveler via a communications network; accessing a database of travel reservation selections; providing the traveler with selected ones of the travel reservation selections via the communications network, the selected ones of the travel reservation selections

corresponding to the travel information provided by the traveler; allowing the traveler and a representative of the travel service to chat over the communications network such that the traveler may direct inquiries to the representative regarding the travel reservation selections and the representative may provide the traveler with additional travel reservation selections based upon the inquiries.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the communications network is the Internet.

FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

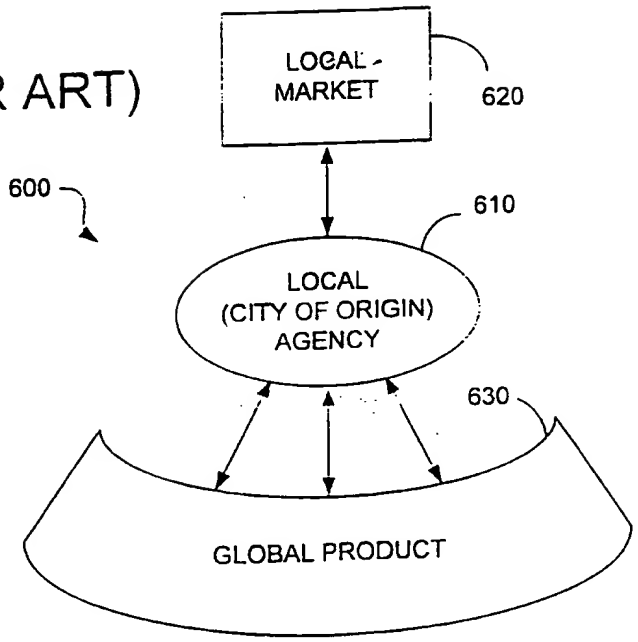
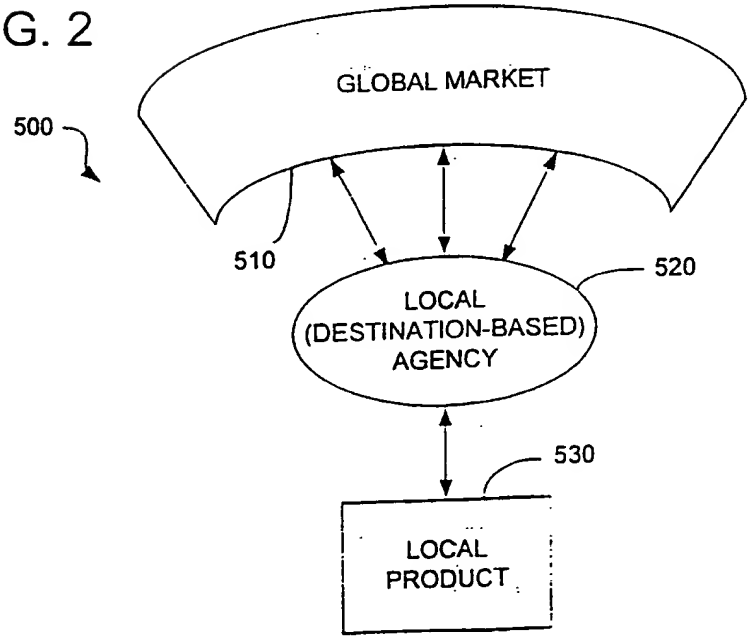


FIG. 2



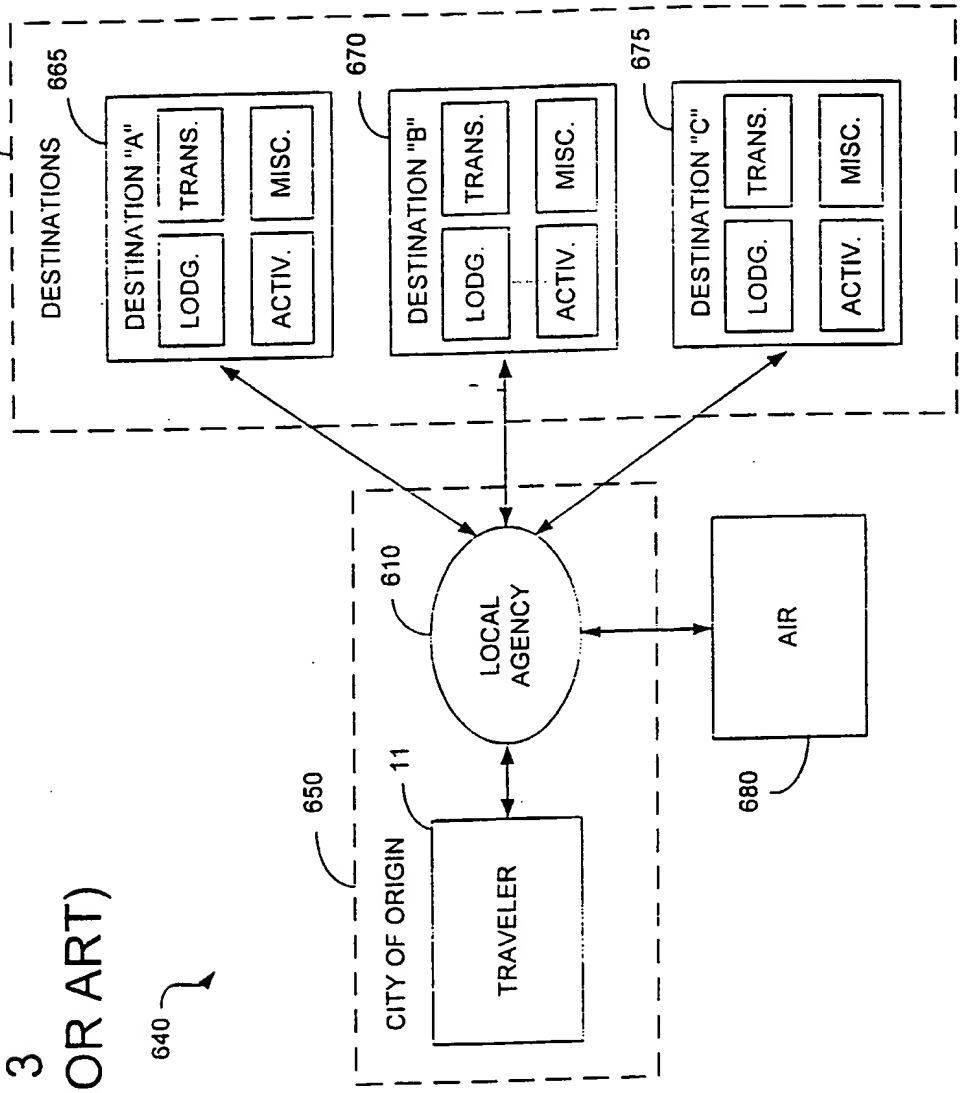


FIG. 3
(PRIOR ART)

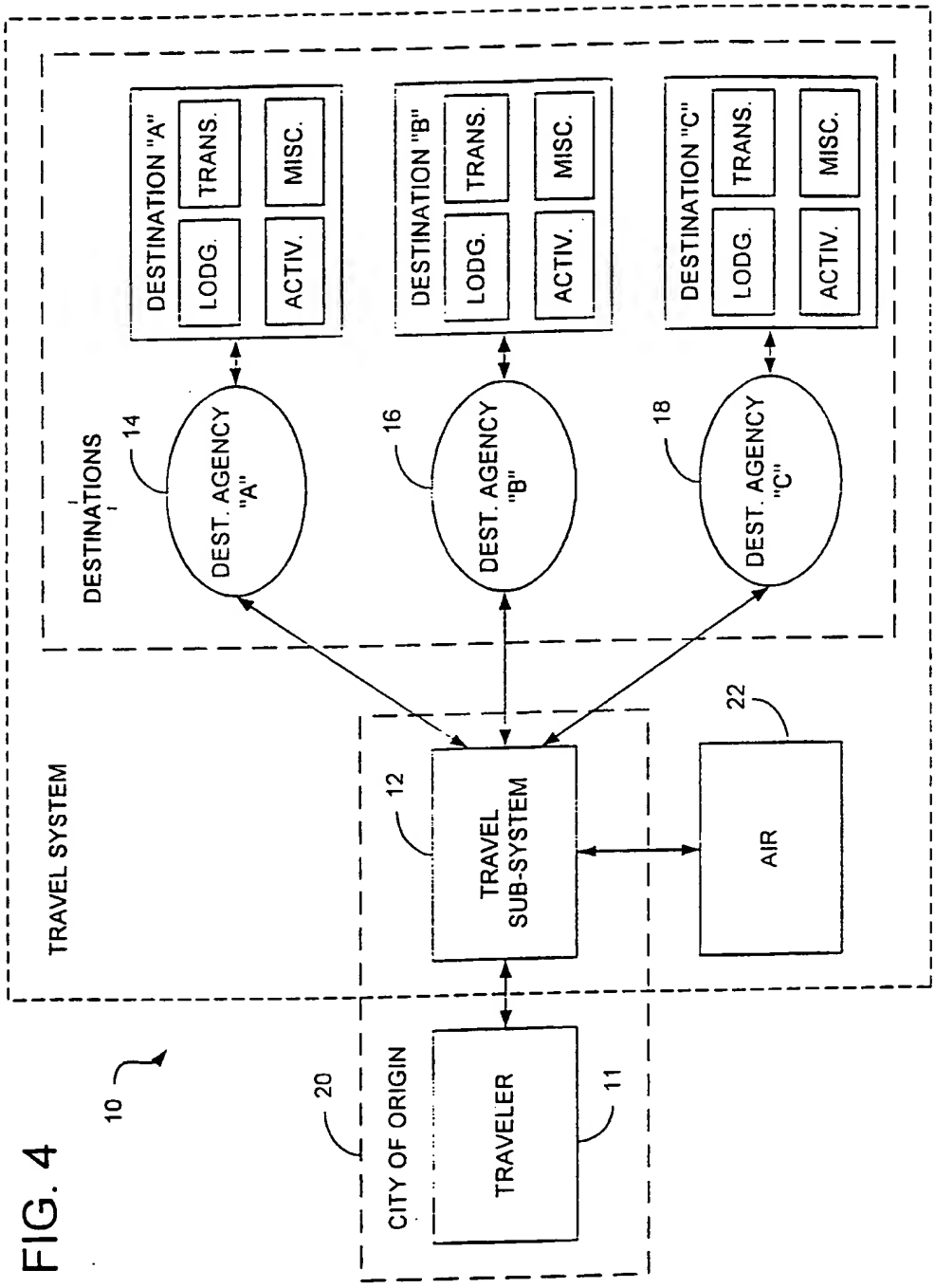
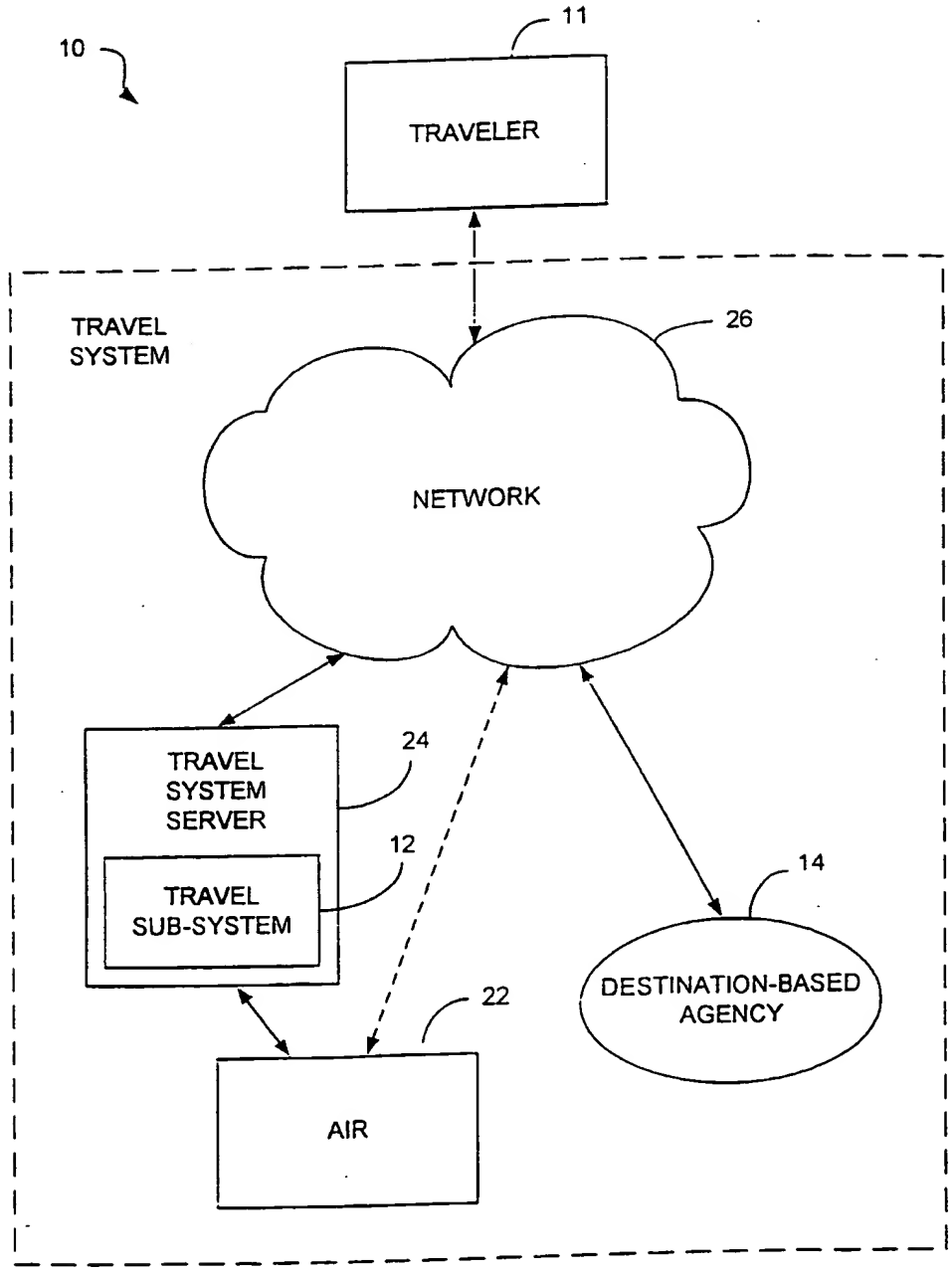

10
TRAVEL SYSTEM
DESTINATIONS
14
DEST. AGENCY "A"
16
DEST. AGENCY "B"
18
DEST. AGENCY "C"
DESTINATION "A"
LODG.
TRANS.
ACTIV.
MISC.
DESTINATION "B"
LODG.
TRANS.
ACTIV.
MISC.
DESTINATION "C"
LODG.
TRANS.
ACTIV.
MISC.
12
TRAVEL SUB-SYSTEM
22
AIR
20
CITY OF ORIGIN
TRAVELER
11

FIG. 4

FIG. 5


10
11
TRAVELER
TRAVEL SYSTEM
26
NETWORK
24
TRAVEL SYSTEM SERVER
12
TRAVEL SUB-SYSTEM
14
DESTINATION-BASED AGENCY
22
AIR

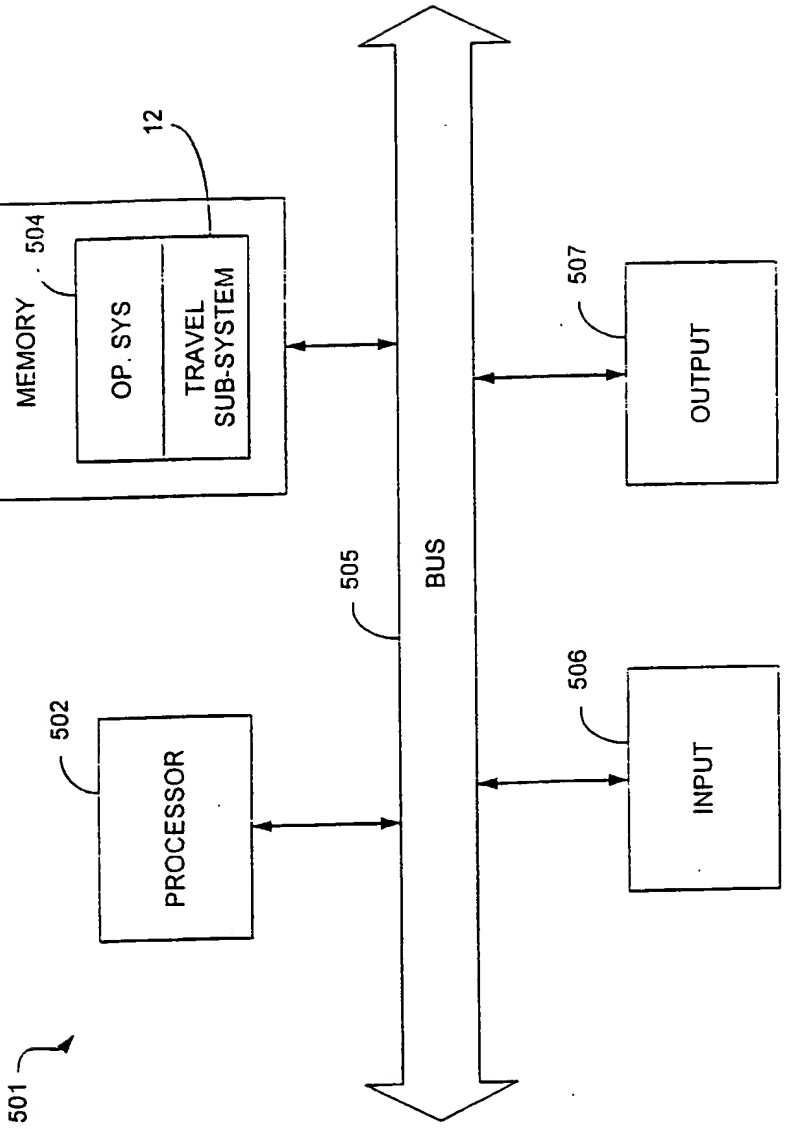
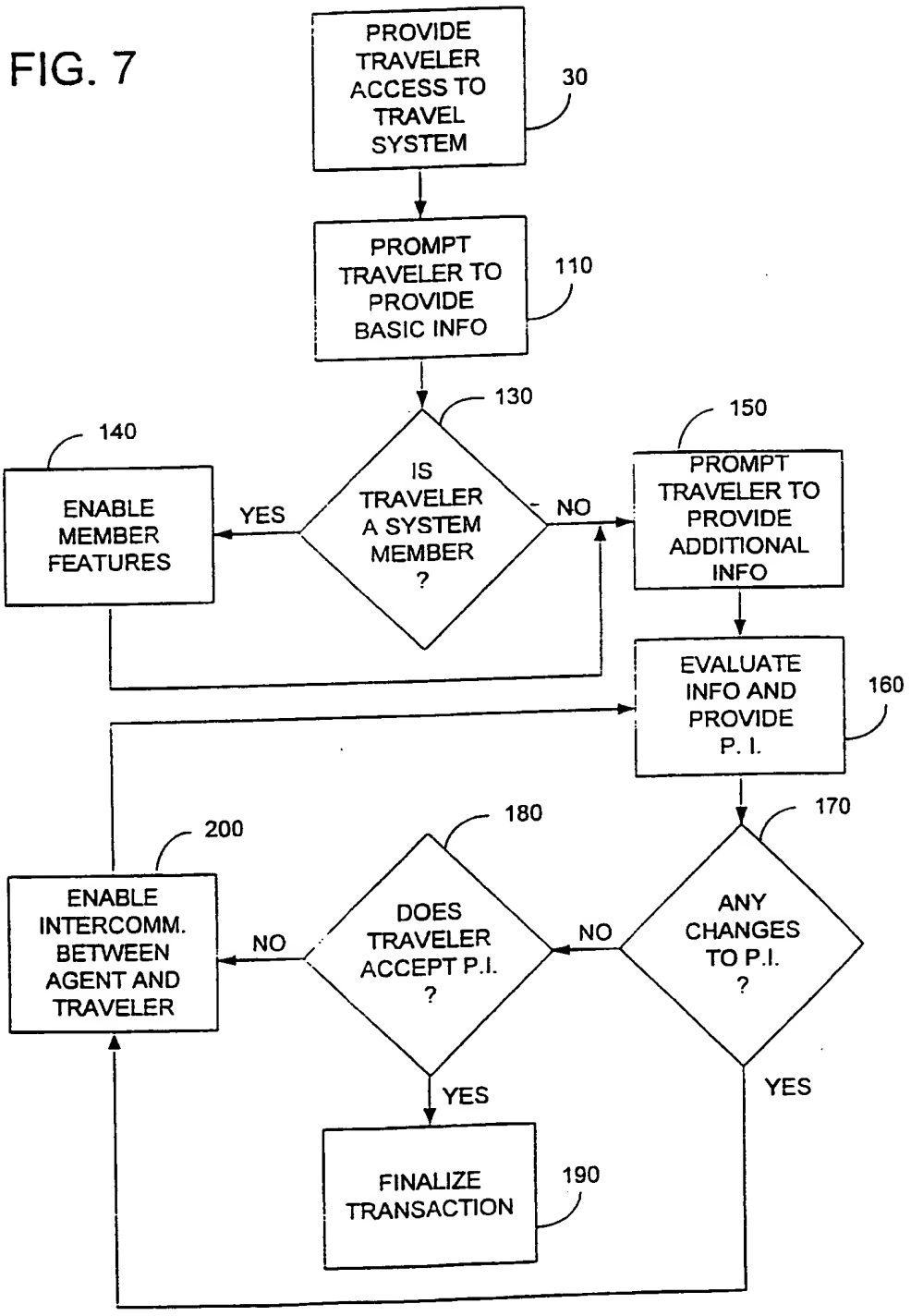

501
503
MEMORY
504
OP. SYS
12
TRAVEL SUB-SYSTEM
502
PROCESSOR
505
BUS
506
INPUT
507
OUTPUT

FIG. 6

FIG. 7


PROVIDE TRAVELER ACCESS TO TRAVEL SYSTEM
30
PROMPT TRAVELER TO PROVIDE BASIC INFO
110
130
IS TRAVELER A SYSTEM MEMBER ?
YES
NO
140
ENABLE MEMBER FEATURES
150
PROMPT TRAVELER TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFO
EVALUATE INFO AND PROVIDE P. I.
160
170
ANY CHANGES TO P.I. ?
NO
180
DOES TRAVELER ACCEPT P.I. ?
NO
200
ENABLE INTERCOMM. BETWEEN AGENT AND TRAVELER
YES
YES
FINALIZE TRANSACTION
190

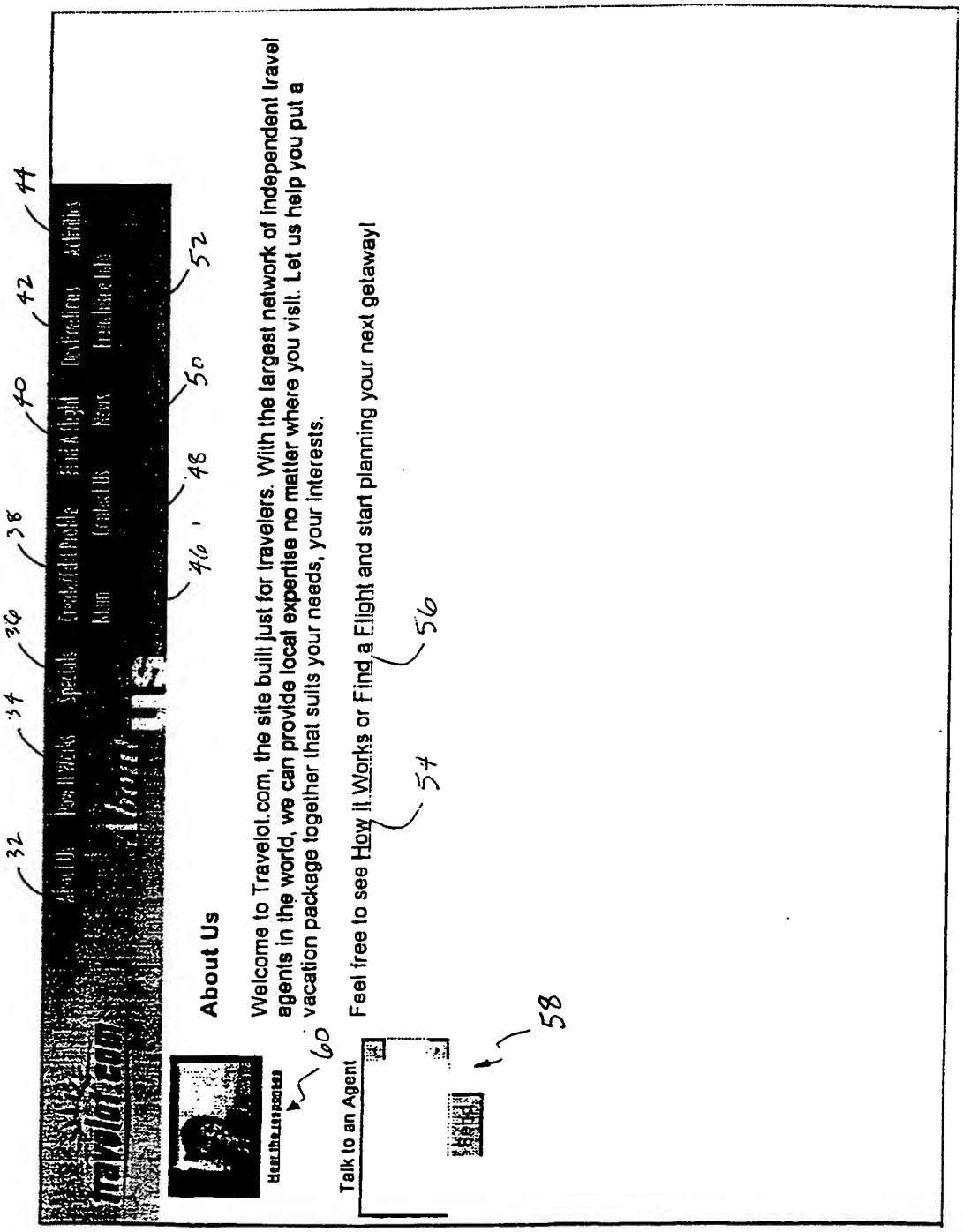
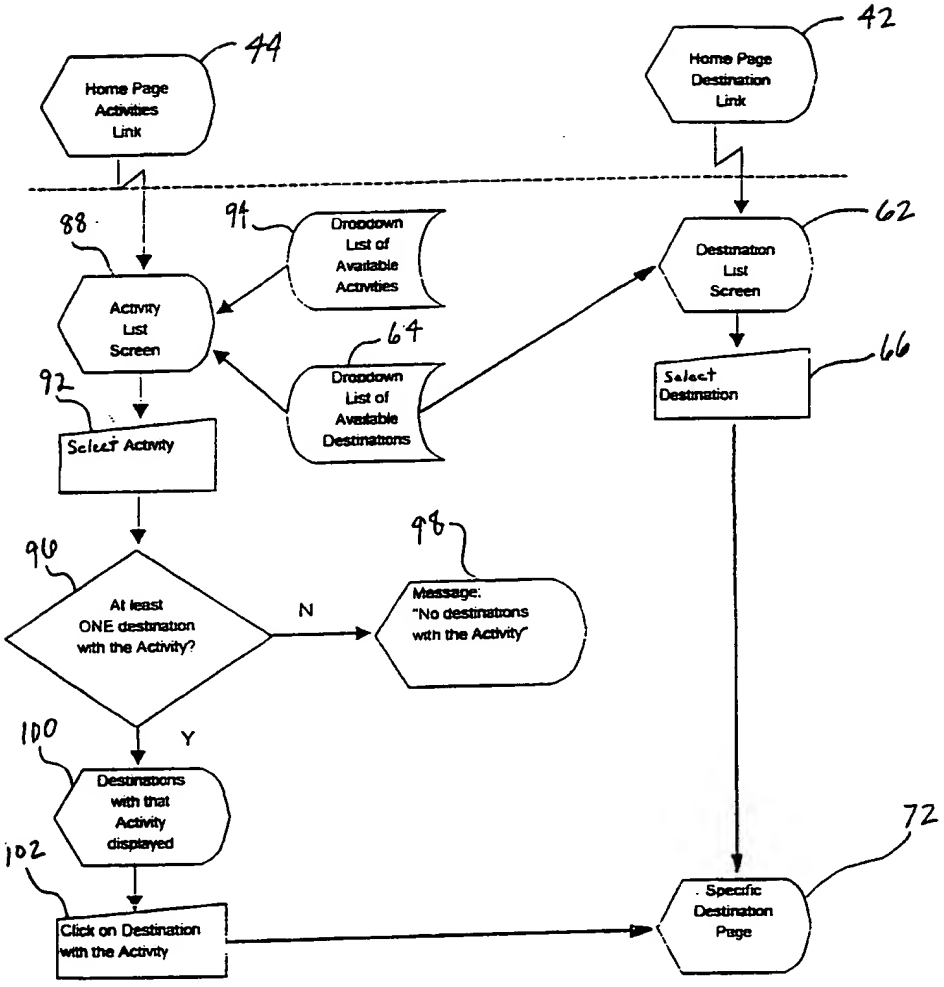

32
34
30
38
40
42
44
46
48
50
52
About Us
Welcome to Travelot.com, the site built just for travelers. With the largest network of independent travel agents in the world, we can provide local expertise no matter where you visit. Let us help you put a vacation package together that suits your needs, your interests.
Feel free to see How It Works or Find a Flight and start planning your next getaway!
54
56
58
60
Talk to an Agent

FIG. 9


Home Page Activities Link
44
Home Page Destination Link
42
88
Activity List Screen
94
Dropdown List of Available Activities
64
Dropdown List of Available Destinations
62
Destination List Screen
66
Select Destination
92
Select Activity
96
At least ONE destination with the Activity?
N
98
Message: "No destinations with the Activity"
Y
100
Destinations with that Activity displayed
102
Click on Destination with the Activity
72
Specific Destination Page

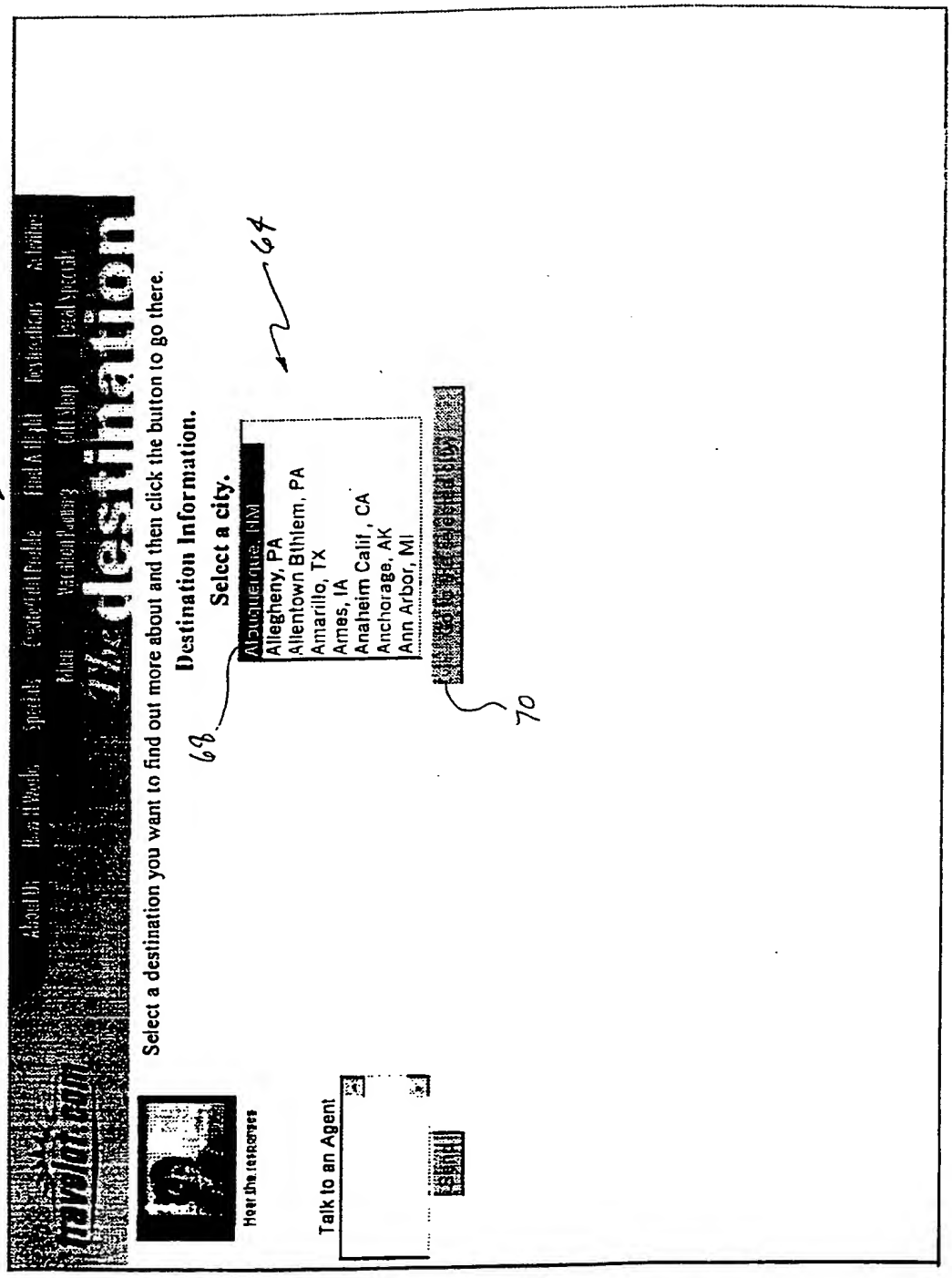
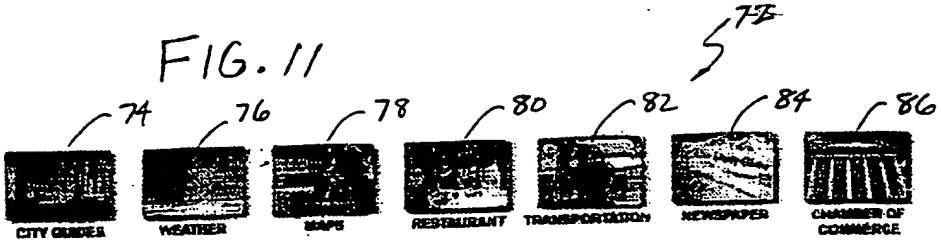

62
destination
Select a destination you want to find out more about and then click the button to go there.
Destination Information.
Select a city.
64
69
Albuquerque, NM
Allegheny, PA
Allentown Bthlem, PA
Amarillo, TX
Ames, IA
Anaheim Calif., CA
Anchorage, AK
Ann Arbor, MI
70
Talk to an Agent

FIG. 10

FIG. 11



Albuquerque, NM

A word from Acme Travel

Winter in the southern Rockies (the Sangre de Cristo Range of NE New Mexico) is beautiful, with ample snowfall allowing for great skiing. However, snow here in Alubuquerque is an infrequent event, allowing for easy travel throughout the region in the lower elevations.

Live theatre is alive and well in New Mexico. The Broadway Touring Company of Cats will be in town the third and fourth weeks of December. For more in-depth information, feel free to browse our local newspaper (hyperlink in blue).

There are some great shows in town and the Ansel Adams photographic retrospective at the New Mexico Museum of Art is a "don't miss". It runs through the last week in January.

For tours of Albuquerque, tickets to any events, the best places to shop, and the best restaurants... (not necessarily the most expensive), we can steer you in the right direction and make all the arrangements.

Albuquerque is a wonderful blend of the Old West and the Twentieth Century, and if you let me know what you are looking for , we will work our hardest to exceed your expectations.

We look forward to working with you and making sure this is your best trip to Albuquerque...

Fill out the Travelot Profile (if you have not already) and then take a couple of minutes to complete the trip application and please be sure to let me know of anything special you are looking for in this trip.

Upcoming events in Albuquerque, NM

Jazz in the Park — Continuous
Weekly jazz festival. Held every Saturday. Come listen to some cool tunes.

Winter Carnival — 01/01 - 01/21 Annually
Skiing competition in nearby mountains. Ice sculpting contest. Ice skating for fun at local rinks.

July 4th fireworks — 07/04 Annually
Fireworks shot off from outside of town. Starts at dusk

Chilli cook-off — 09/07 - 09/14 Annually
Chilli cook-off and beer fest.

Christmas Tour of Homes — 12/07 - 12/24 Annually
Visit historic homes in Albuquerque, all decked out for the holidays. Homes date from to late 1800's to 1920's. Tours run daily from 12/7 through 12/24. A walking tour in our historic district, cost is $18 for adults and $10 for children under 12. Children under 6 are free.

Please tell us about the vacation you'd like

If you haven't filled in your travel profile you should do this now. Completing your profile will allow us to build a vacation which better matches your preferences.

FIG. 12

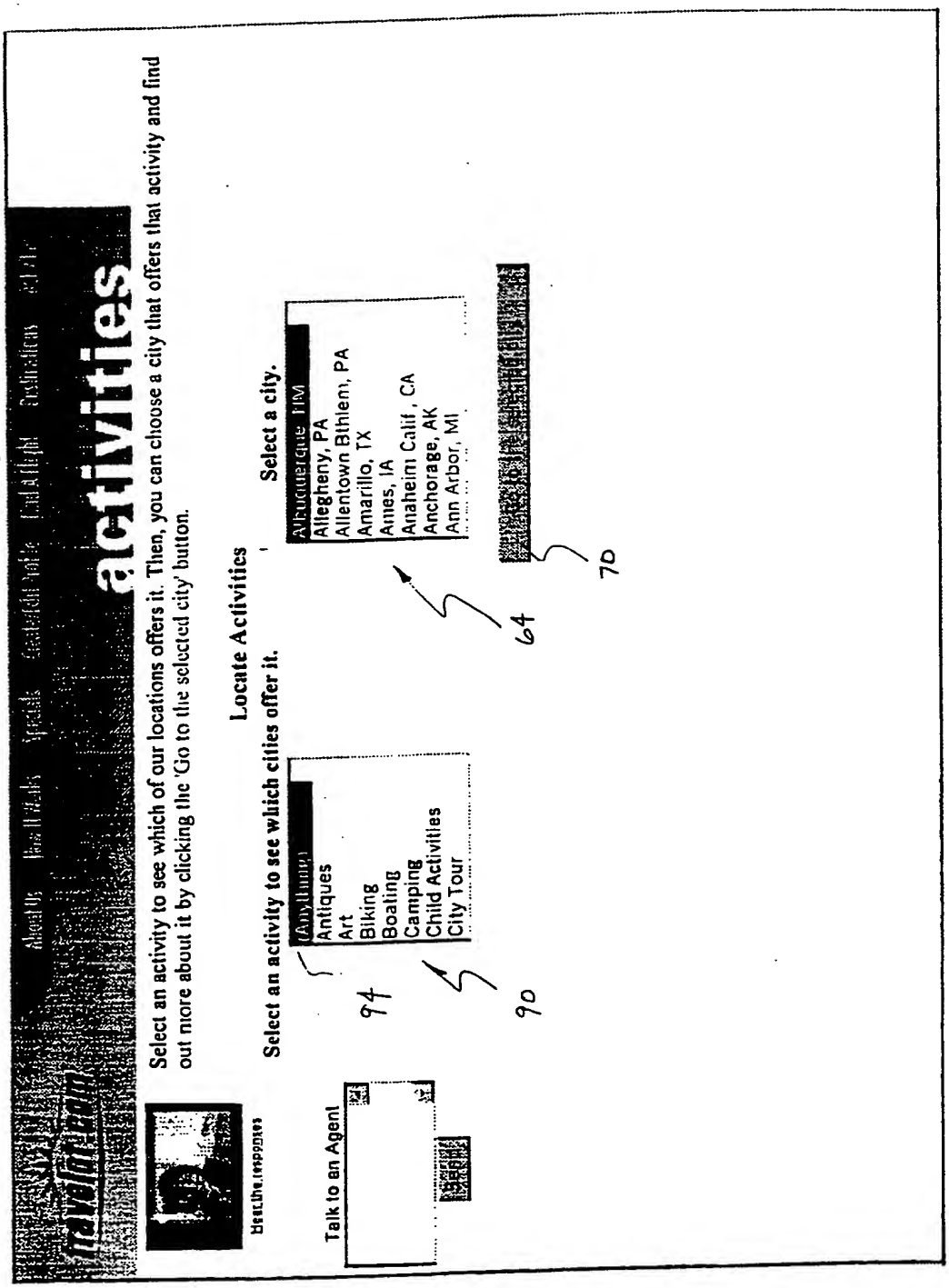

activities
Select an activity to see which of our locations offers it. Then, you can choose a city that offers that activity and find out more about it by clicking the 'Go to the selected city' button.
Locate Activities
Select an activity to see which cities offer it.
Select a city.
Talk to an Agent
Antiques
Art
Biking
Boating
Camping
Child Activities
City Tour
Allegheny, PA
Allentown Bthlem, PA
Amarillo, TX
Anaheim Calif., CA
Anchorage, AK
Ann Arbor, MI
68
94
90
64
70

FIG. 13

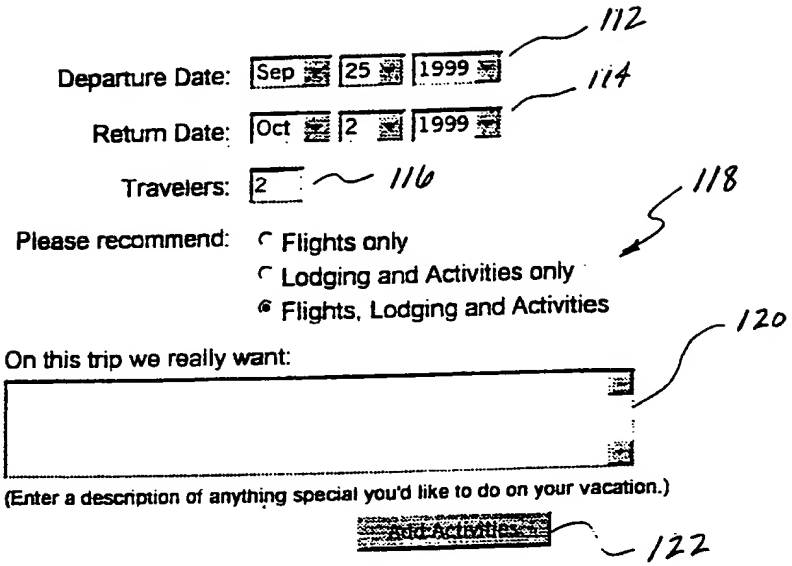

112
Departure Date: Sep 25 1999
114
Return Date: Oct 2 1999
Travelers: 2
116
118
Please recommend:
Flights only
Lodging and Activities only
Flights, Lodging and Activities
120
On this trip we really want:
(Enter a description of anything special you'd like to do on your vacation.)
Add Activities
122

FIG. 14

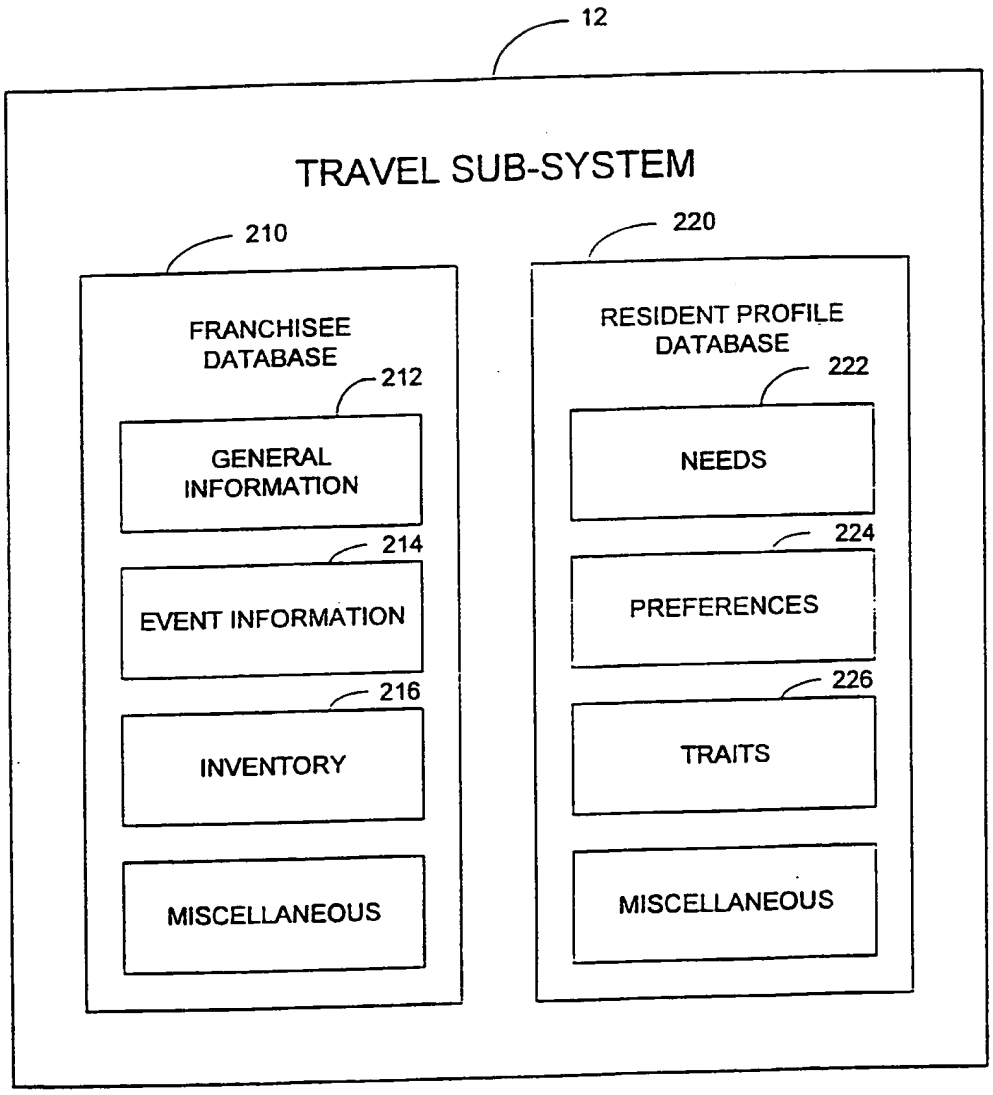

12
TRAVEL SUB-SYSTEM
210
FRANCHISEE DATABASE
212
GENERAL INFORMATION
214
EVENT INFORMATION
216
INVENTORY
MISCELLANEOUS
220
RESIDENT PROFILE DATABASE
222
NEEDS
224
PREFERENCES
226
TRAITS
MISCELLANEOUS

FIG. 15

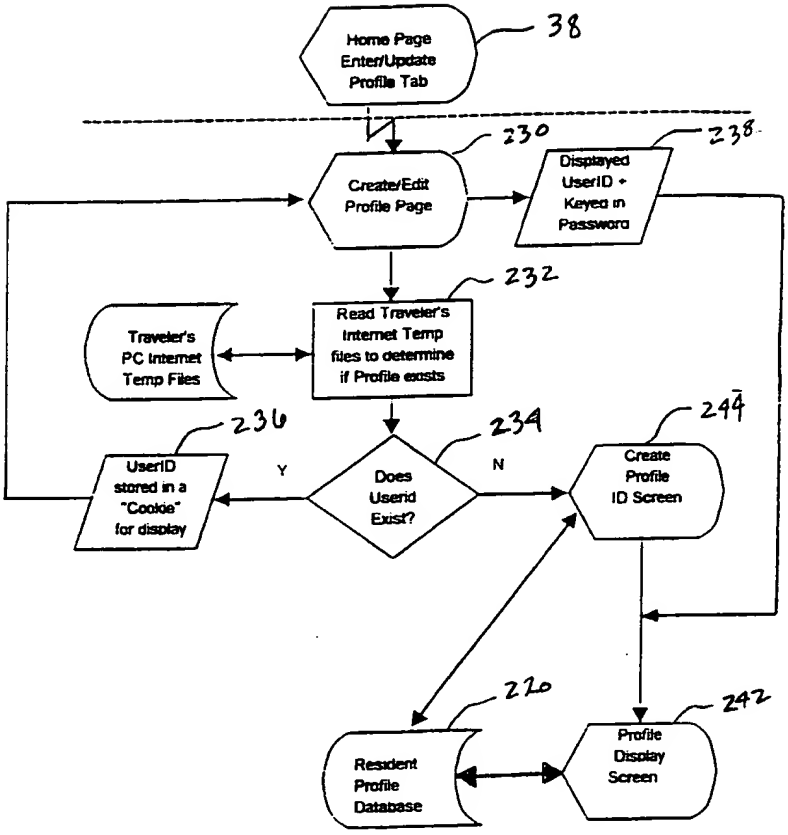

Home Page Enter/Update Profile Tab
38
230
Create/Edit Profile Page
238
Displayed UserID + Keyed in Password
232
Read Traveler's Internet Temp files to determine if Profile exists
Traveler's PC Internet Temp Files
234
Does Userid Exist?
Y
N
236
UserID stored in a "Cookie" for display
244
Create Profile ID Screen
220
Resident Profile Database
242
Profile Display Screen

FIG. 10

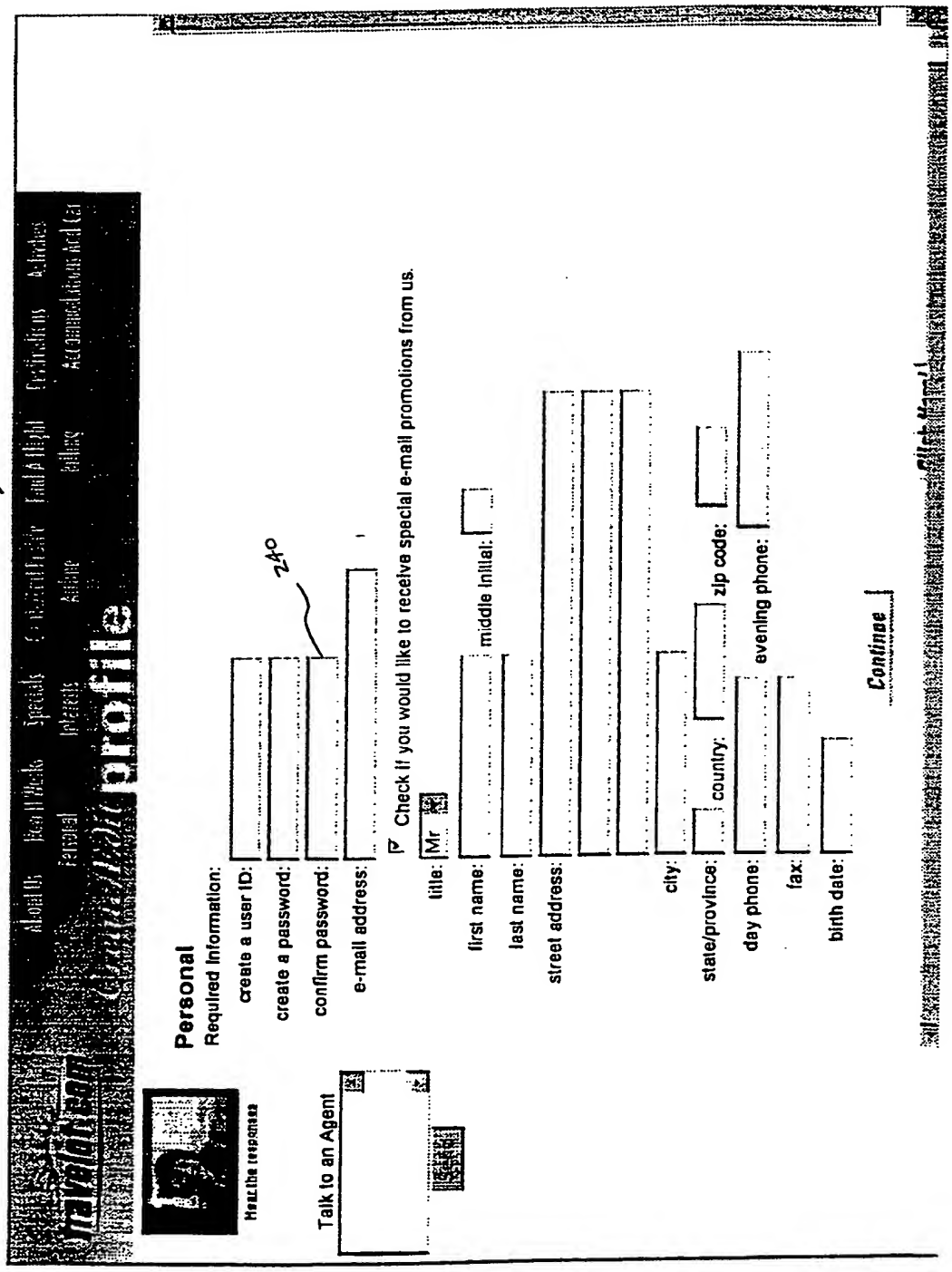
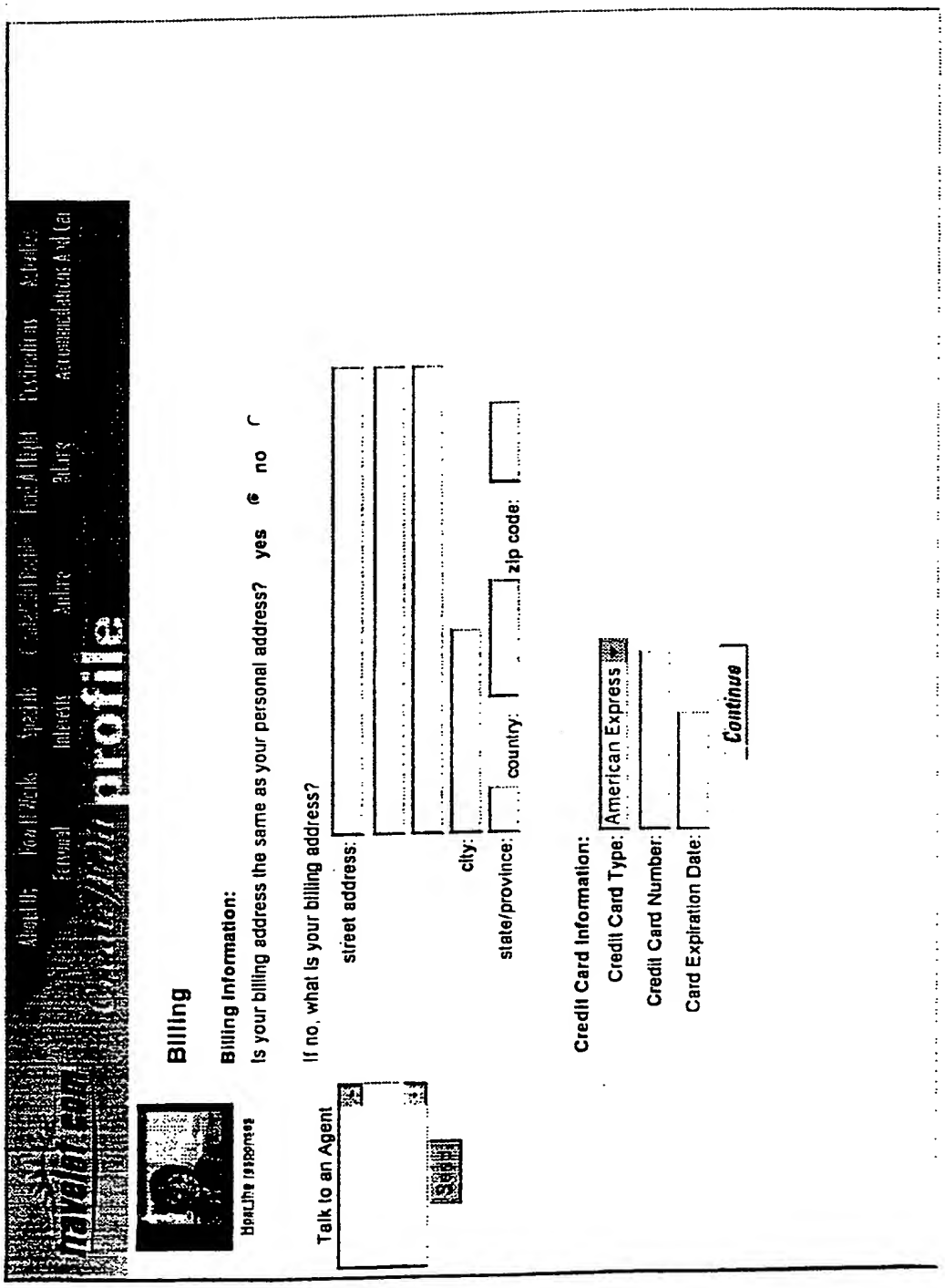

230
profile
Personal
Required Information:
create a user ID:
create a password:
confirm password:
e-mail address:
240
Check if you would like to receive special e-mail promotions from us.
title:
Mr
first name:
middle initial:
last name:
street address:
city:
state/province:
country:
zip code:
day phone:
evening phone:
fax:
birth date:
Continue
Talk to an Agent

FIG. 11


profile
Billing
Billing Information:
Is your billing address the same as your personal address? yes no
If no, what is your billing address?
street address:
city:
state/province:
country:
zip code:
Credit Card Information:
Credit Card Type:
American Express
Credit Card Number:
Card Expiration Date:
Continue
Talk to an Agent

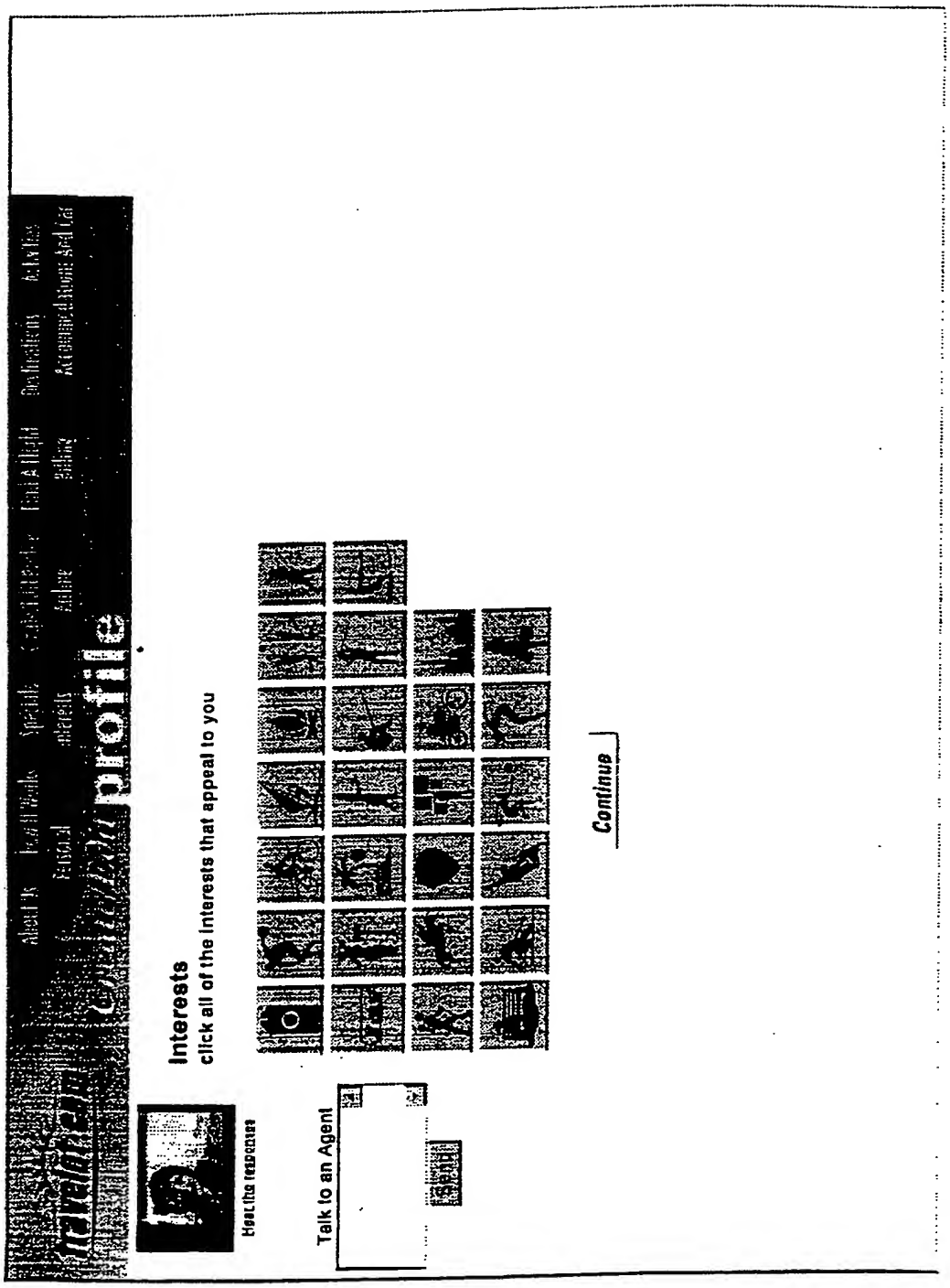

profile
Interests
click all of the interests that appeal to you
Talk to an Agent
Continue

FIG. 18

FIG. 19

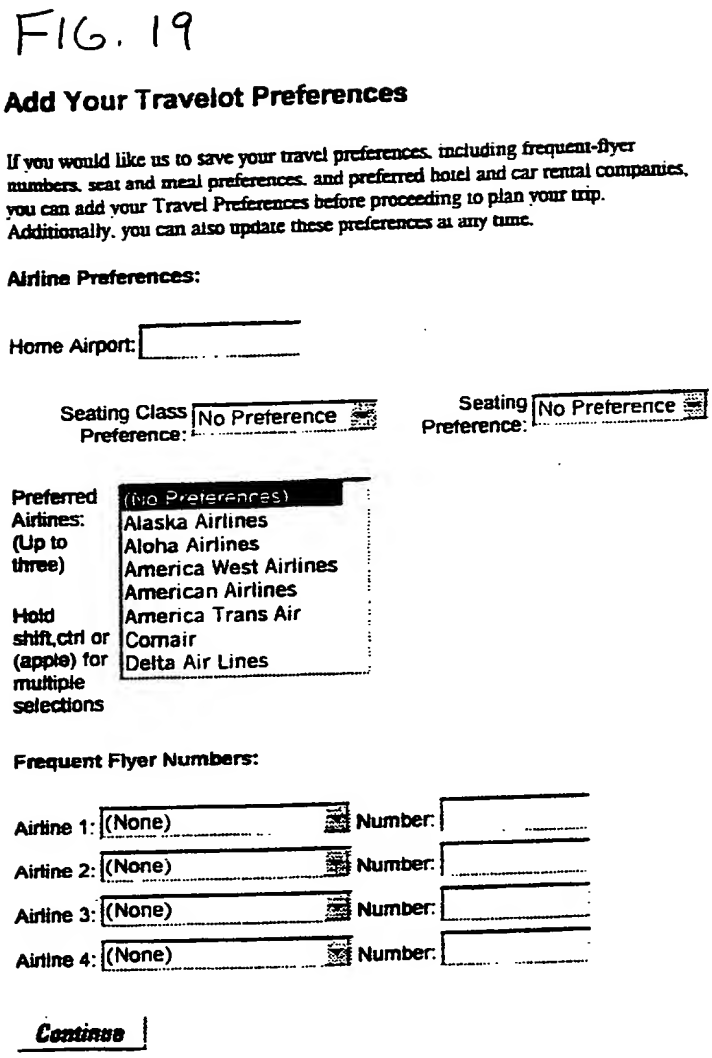

Add Your Travelot Preferences
If you would like us to save your travel preferences, including frequent-flyer numbers, seat and meal preferences, and preferred hotel and car rental companies, you can add your Travel Preferences before proceeding to plan your trip. Additionally, you can also update these preferences at any time.
Airline Preferences:
Home Airport:
Seating Class Preference: No Preference
Seating Preference: No Preference
Preferred Airlines: (Up to three)
Hold shift,ctrl or (apple) for multiple selections
(No Preferences)
Alaska Airlines
Aloha Airlines
America West Airlines
American Airlines
America Trans Air
Comair
Delta Air Lines
Frequent Flyer Numbers:
Airline 1: (None) Number:
Airline 2: (None) Number:
Airline 3: (None) Number:
Airline 4: (None) Number:
Continue

FIG. 20

Accomodations

Rental Car Preferences:

Car Type: Economy | 2 or 4 Door | Automatic | (None)

Preferred Car Vendors: (Up to three)

Hold shift,ctrl or (apple) for multiple selections

- (No Preferences)
- Alamo
- Avis
- Budget
- Dollar
- Enterprise
- General
- Hertz

Car Rental Membership Numbers:

Car Vendor 1: None Number:

Car Vendor 2: None Number:

Car Vendor 3: None Number:

Hotel Preferences:

Maximum Rate:

Preferred Hotel Vendors: (Up to three)

Hold shift,ctrl or (apple) for multiple selections

- (No Preferences)
- Adams Mark
- All Suites
- Amerisuites
- Best Western
- Biltmore Hotels
- Clarion Hotels
- Comfort Inns

Hotel Program Numbers:

Hotel Vendor 1: (None) Number:

Hotel Vendor 2: (None) Number:

Hotel Vendor 3: (None) Number:

Hotel Vendor 4: (None) Number:

FIG. 21

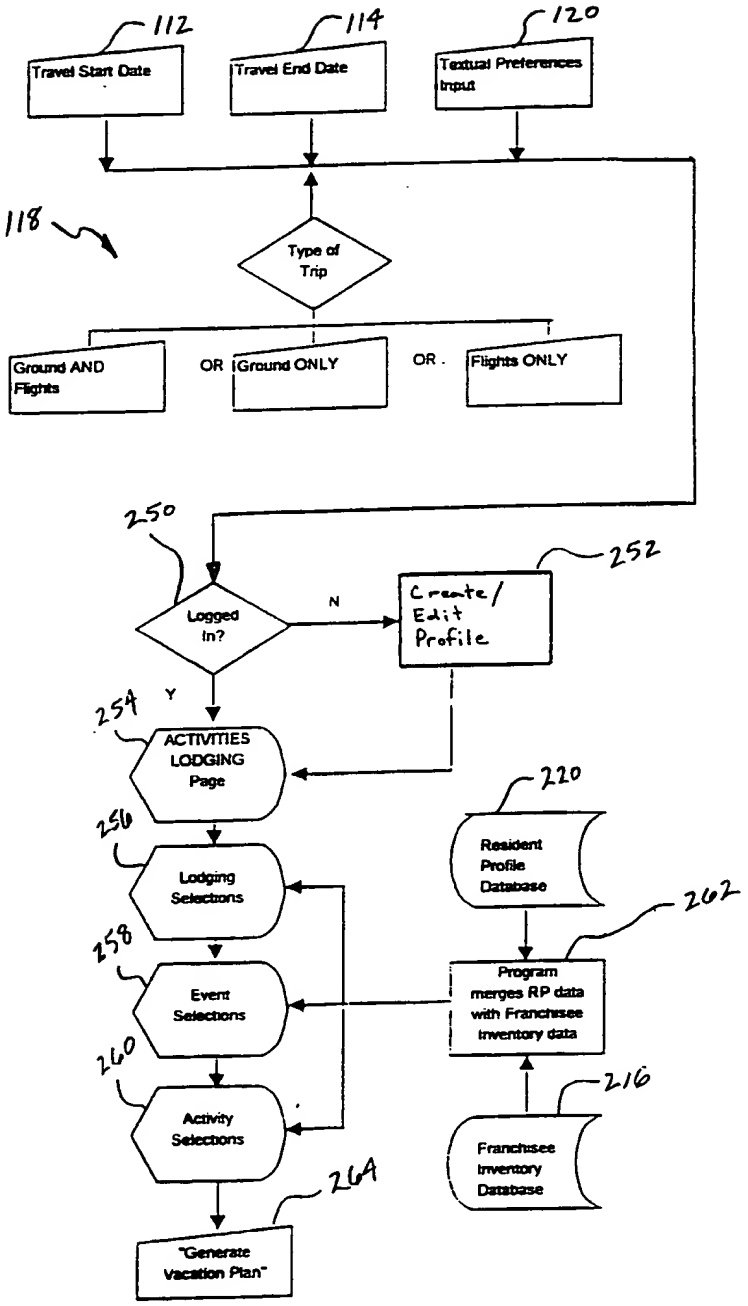

112
Travel Start Date
114
Travel End Date
120
Textual Preferences Input
118
Type of Trip
Ground AND Flights
OR
Ground ONLY
OR
Flights ONLY
250
Logged In?
N
Y
252
Create/ Edit Profile
254
ACTIVITIES LODGING Page
256
Lodging Selections
258
Event Selections
260
Activity Selections
264
"Generate Vacation Plan"
220
Resident Profile Database
262
Program merges RP data with Franchisee inventory data
216
Franchisee Inventory Database

FIG. 22

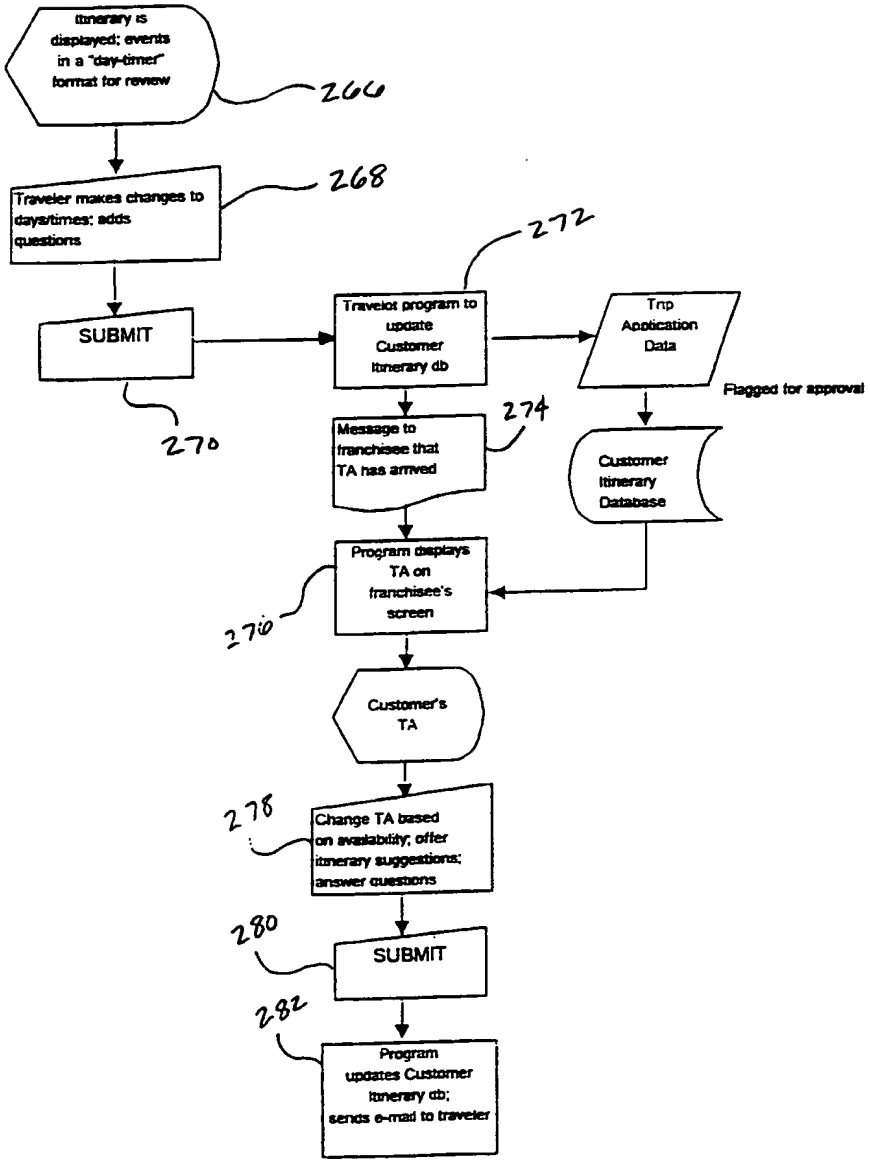

Itinerary is displayed; events in a "day-timer" format for review
266
Traveler makes changes to days/times; adds questions
268
SUBMIT
270
272
Travelot program to update Customer Itinerary db
Trip Application Data
Flagged for approval
Message to franchisee that TA has arrived
274
Customer Itinerary Database
Program displays TA on franchisee's screen
276
Customer's TA
278
Change TA based on availability; offer itinerary suggestions; answer questions
280
SUBMIT
282
Program updates Customer Itinerary db; sends e-mail to traveler

FIG. 23

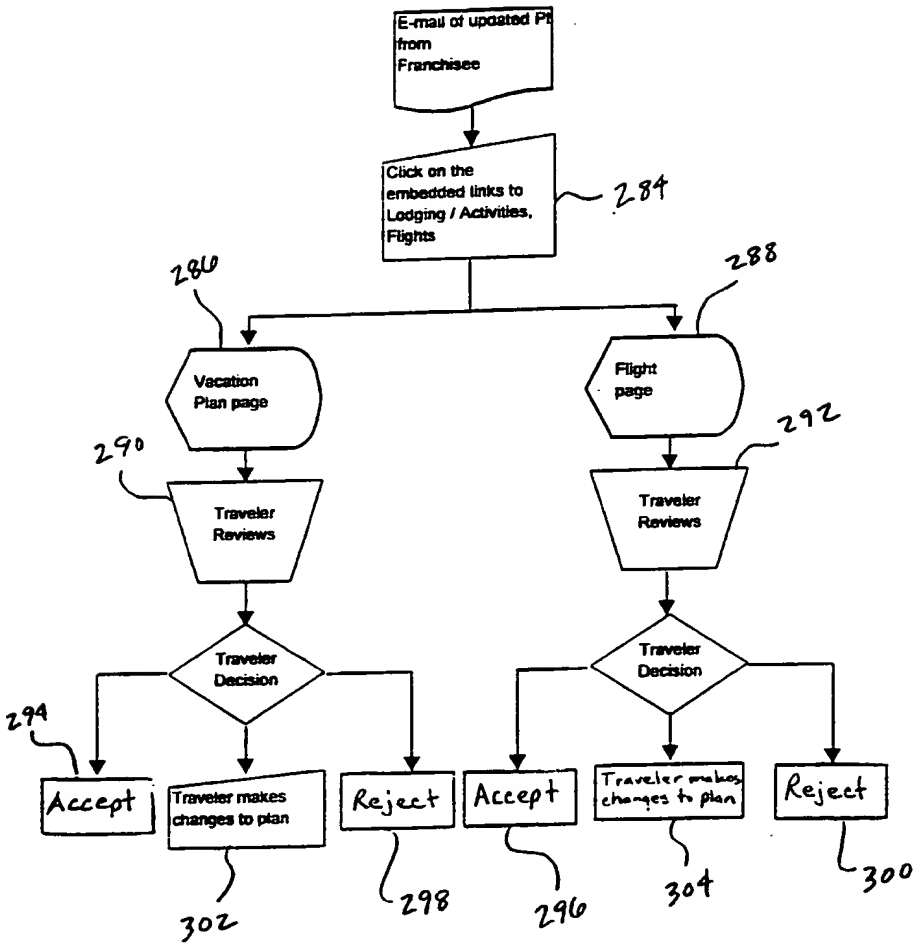

E-mail of updated PT from Franchisee
Click on the embedded links to Lodging / Activities, Flights
284
286
288
Vacation Plan page
Flight page
290
292
Traveler Reviews
Traveler Reviews
Traveler Decision
Traveler Decision
294
Accept
Traveler makes changes to plan
Reject
Accept
Traveler makes changes to plan
Reject
302
298
296
304
300

FIG. 24

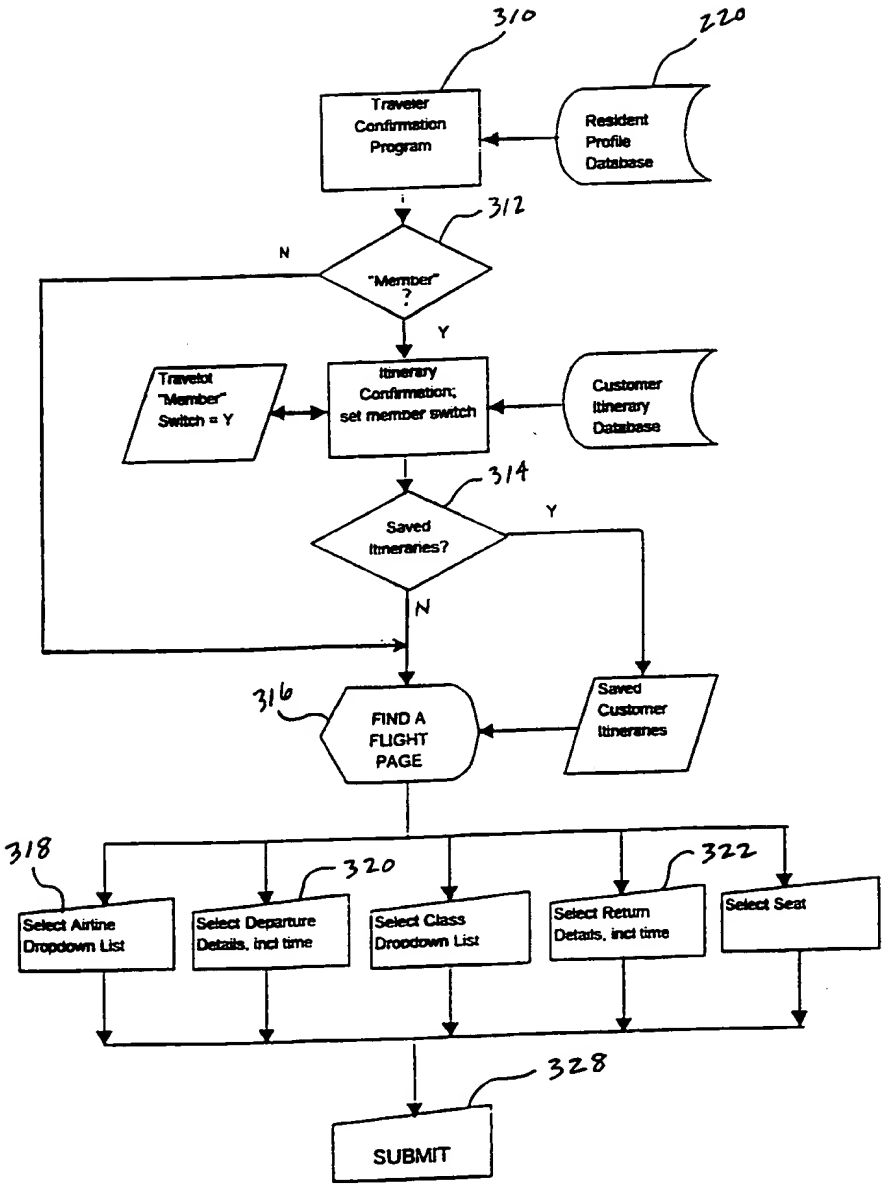

310
220
Traveler Confirmation Program
Resident Profile Database
312
"Member" ?
N
Y
Traveler "Member" Switch = Y
Itinerary Confirmation; set member switch
Customer Itinerary Database
314
Saved Itineraries?
Y
N
316
FIND A FLIGHT PAGE
Saved Customer Itineraries
318
320
322
Select Airline Dropdown List
Select Departure Details, incl time
Select Class Dropdown List
Select Return Details, incl time
Select Seat
328
SUBMIT

FIG. 25

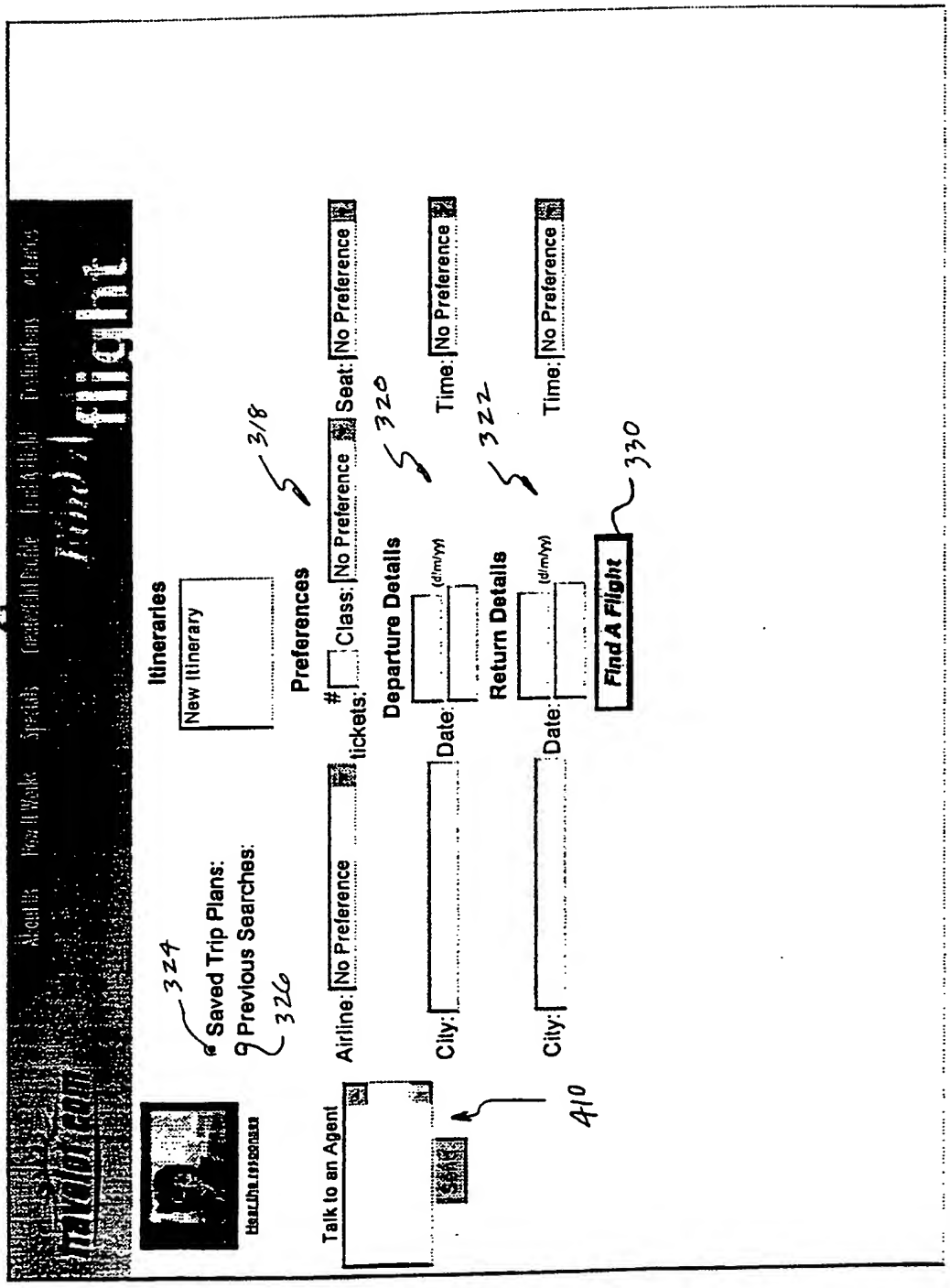

Itineraries
New Itinerary
Saved Trip Plans:
Previous Searches:
Preferences
Airline: No Preference
tickets:
Class: No Preference
Seat: No Preference
Departure Details
City:
Date: (d/m/yy)
Time: No Preference
Return Details
City:
Date: (d/m/yy)
Time: No Preference
Find A Flight
Talk to an Agent
Cancel
324
326
318
320
322
330
410
316

FIG. 26

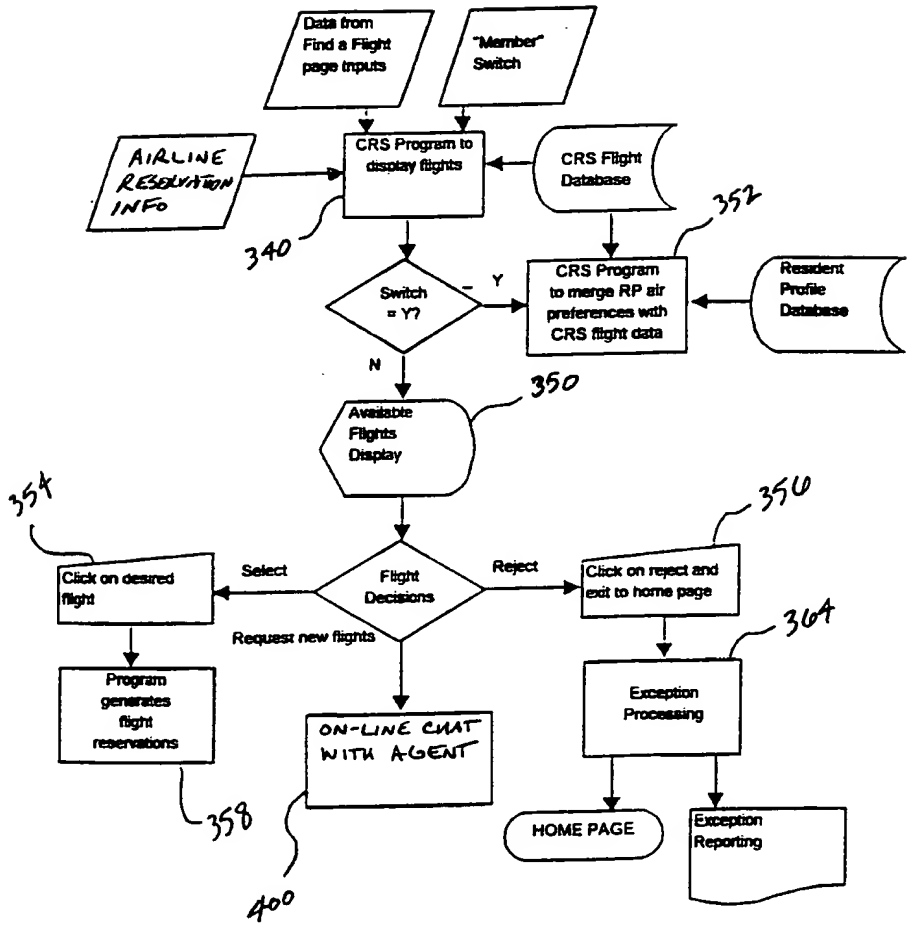
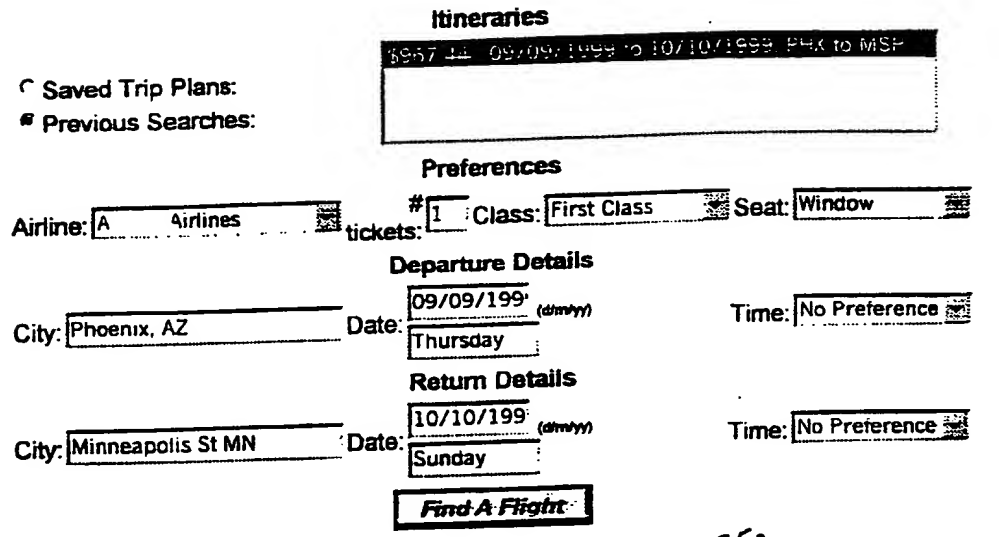

Data from Find a Flight page inputs
"Member" Switch
AIRLINE RESERVATION INFO
CRS Program to display flights
CRS Flight Database
340
352
Switch = Y?
Y
N
CRS Program to merge RP air preferences with CRS flight data
Resident Profile Database
350
Available Flights Display
354
356
Click on desired flight
Select
Flight Decisions
Reject
Click on reject and exit to home page
Request new flights
Program generates flight reservations
ON-LINE CHAT WITH AGENT
Exception Processing
364
358
400
HOME PAGE
Exception Reporting

FIG. 27



350

	Airline	Depart Time	Arrive Time	Departing 09/09/1999	Arriving 10/10/1999	Connecting Cities
$967.44	A flight 750	09:45am	2:45pm	Phoenix, AZ	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	
[redacted]	A flight 334	08:05am	09:37am	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	Phoenix, AZ	
$967.44	B flight 580	08:40am	1:43pm	Phoenix, AZ	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	
[redacted]	B flight 101	09:20am	10:40am	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	Phoenix, AZ	
$967.44	C flight 784	7:30pm	12:15am	Phoenix, AZ	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	
[redacted]	D flight 101	09:20am	10:40am	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	Phoenix, AZ	
$967.44	E flight 2752	11:58am	5:01pm	Phoenix, AZ	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	
[redacted]	F flight 334	08:05am	09:37am	Minneapolis St Pl, MN	Phoenix, AZ	

Air Buy FIG. 28

These are the flights you selected. If the information below is correct and you wish to purchase this ticket press the 'Confirm Purchase' button. To continue looking at other flights push the 'Back to Find a Flight' button.

360

Leaving							
Date	Flight	Airline	Class	Departing	Time	Arriving	Time
10/01/1999	2803	A	V	Phoenix, AZ	7:43am	San Francisco, CA	9:52am

Returning							
Date	Flight	Airline	Class	Departing	Time	Arriving	Time
12/02/1999	2435	B	V	San Francisco, CA	9:11am	Phoenix, AZ	12:10am

Billing information
Mr Christopher Tobler 8828 Phoenix, Arizona 85021
Credit Card
Credit Card Type:
Credit Card Number:
Card Expiration Date:
☐ Do not save this information for future purchases
If any of this information is incorrect or incomplete you can update it by visiting the Profile page.

Price	
Base Fare	$150.00
Tax	$18.75
Total	$168.75

Passengers
1

366

362

Back to Find a Flight | Confirm Purchase

FIG. 29

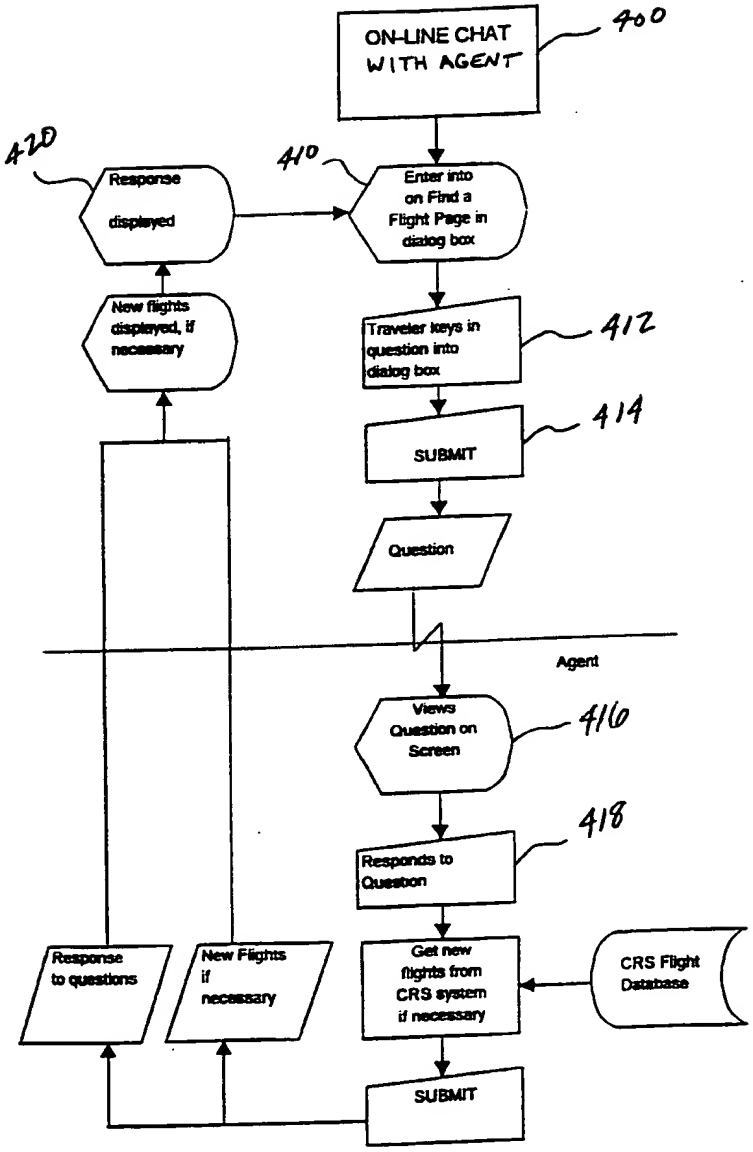
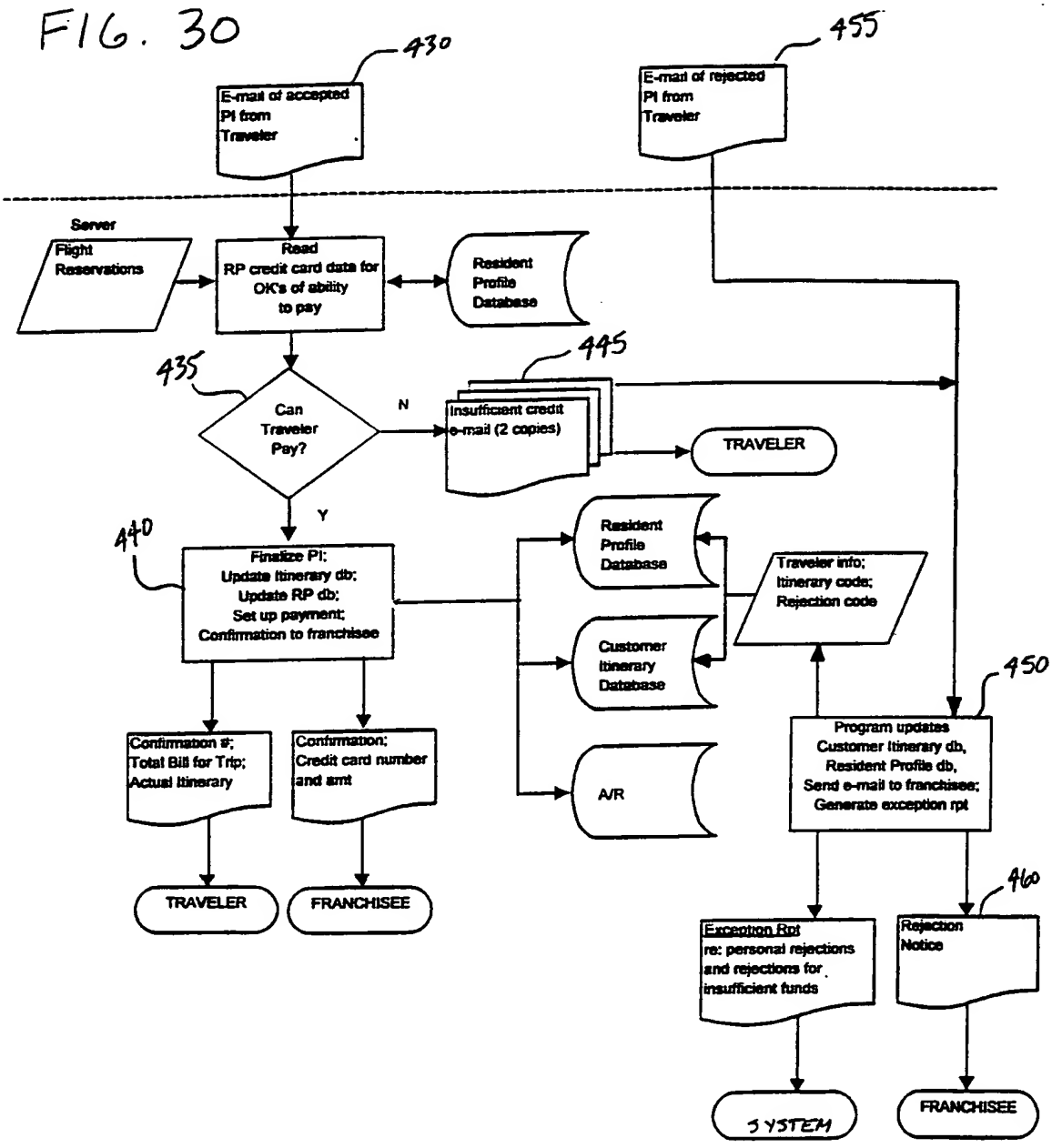

ON-LINE CHAT WITH AGENT
400
Response displayed
420
Enter into on Find a Flight Page in dialog box
410
New flights displayed, if necessary
Traveler keys in question into dialog box
412
SUBMIT
414
Question
Agent
Views Question on Screen
416
Responds to Question
418
Response to questions
New Flights if necessary
Get new flights from CRS system if necessary
CRS Flight Database
SUBMIT

FIG. 30


430
E-mail of accepted PI from Traveler
455
E-mail of rejected PI from Traveler
Server
Flight Reservations
Read RP credit card data for OK's of ability to pay
Resident Profile Database
435
Can Traveler Pay?
N
445
Insufficient credit e-mail (2 copies)
TRAVELER
Y
440
Finalize PI: Update itinerary db; Update RP db; Set up payment; Confirmation to franchisee
Resident Profile Database
Traveler info; Itinerary code; Rejection code
Customer Itinerary Database
A/R
450
Program updates Customer Itinerary db, Resident Profile db, Send e-mail to franchisee; Generate exception rpt
Confirmation #; Total Bill for Trip; Actual Itinerary
Confirmation; Credit card number and amt
TRAVELER
FRANCHISEE
460
Exception Rpt re: personal rejections and rejections for insufficient funds
Rejection Notice
SYSTEM
FRANCHISEE

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US99/22659

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) :G06F 153/02
US CL :705/5

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/5

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

DIALOG, EAST, WEST
search terms: trael agent, tourist, destination, location, computer, internet, world wide web, web browser

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 4,922,439 A (GREENBLATT) 01 May 1990, see abstract.	1-17
A	US 5,422,809 A (GRIFFIN et al.) 06 June 1995, see abstract.	1-17
A,E	UNKNOWN. LeisurePlanet.com. http://www.leisureplanet.com. 06 November 1999	1-17
A,E	UNKNOWN. Collette Tours. http://www.collettetours.com. 06 November 1999.	1-17
A,P	UNKNOWN. Masters of the Web. Travel Agent, Vol. 290, No. 7, 04 May 1998. See Abstract.	1-17

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. [ ] See patent family annex.

*	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E"	earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&"	document member of the same patent family
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
06 DECEMBER 1999	16 DEC 1999
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer E. TODD VOE James R. Matthews Telephone No. (703) 305-9714

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet)(July 1992)*

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US99/22659

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A,P	PR NEWSWIRE. Leisure Planet Taps WORLDSPAN IBE to Give Travelers a Full Range of Online Reservation Options. 21 April 1998.	1-17
A	SEIDEN, A. With Summer Bookings Light, Prices Stay Low. Travel Agent. 21 July 1997.	1-17
A	ELLIOT, E. Passport to Sales. Travel Agent. Page 28. 24 March 1997.	1-17